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DIALOGUES IN LIMBO

by

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PERSONS OF THE DIALOGUES

The Shades of

DEMOCRITUS,

ALCIBIADES,

ARISTIPPUS the Cyrenaic,

DIONYSIUS the Younger, once Tyrant of Syracuse,

SOCRATES,

AVICENNA,

And the Spirit of

A STRANGER still living on Earth.

I

THE SCENT OF PHILOSOPHIES

Democritus. Bring the Stranger, bring the Stranger. Let us see how he is put together. I smell one goodish ingredient, but the compound is new-fangled, yes (*sniffing*), and ill mixed.

Alcibiades. You can't possibly scent him at this distance. Not even a dog could. For a Christian he is rather well washed.

Democritus. Before you contradict an old man, my fair friend, you should endeavour to understand him. The Stranger might be as clean as a river-god, who cannot live out of running water, and I should not be prevented from discerning the odour of his thoughts. Your barbarians, I know, have no proper regimen. The few bathe too often, out of luxury or fussiness, perhaps in steam or in hot water ; and the many never bathe at all. Thus those who wash among them are quite washed out, and yet the sodden smell of them is perceptible and most unpleasant. But it was not of their soft bodies that I was speaking, but of their rotten minds. Did you never hear that a philosophy can be smelt ?

Alcibiades. You are in your laughing mood.

Democritus. Impudence! Am I a jester or a sophist, like your pop-eyed Socrates? Do I study to tickle the fancy of young fops with midnight drinking-bouts and myths and mock scepticism, in order to confirm them in the end in all their guard-room prejudices and ignorance? Know that I am a scientific observer. Philosophies diffuse odours.

Alcibiades. It will take a long argument to prove it.

Democritus. What has argument to do with truth? True knowledge is nothing but keen sensation and faithful remembrance, penetrating to that fine texture of nature which your fluent talker cannot stop to see. The soul is a fluid, finer and warmer than air, yet somewhat viscous, and capable of retaining or renewing the most intricate and mighty motions. She continually rushes forth from her hearth, as from a furnace, through the veins and ventricles of the body, vivifying all its parts, healing wounds, and harmonizing motions; and she also escapes, or exudes her waste products, through the mouth and nostrils in breath, through the eye in glances, and in seed through the organs of generation. Parcels of the soul issue thereby entire, like colonists from their mother-town, ready to renew abroad her complete life and economy. And just as the parents of the new-born soul are two, one who sheds the seed and one who receives and fosters it, so in sensation and knowledge there is a feminine as well as a masculine faculty; for the

thing perceived is the father of perception and the soul perceiving is its fertile mother. Now you are not to suppose that man alone is animate, or only beasts similar to man. Everything natural is held together by circling streams of magnetic atoms, stronger than hoops of steel. These are its soul; and the form which this soul impresses on the body, it impresses also on the surrounding air, radiating images of itself in all directions, and a kindred influence. Light and aether, which fill the heavens, are a great medium of propagation for these seeds and effluvia of things, which the eye and ear and nostrils and sensitive skin (being feminine organs) receive and transform according to their kind, sometimes bringing forth a genuine action or thought, the legitimate heir and image of its father, and sometimes a spurious changeling, or fancy-child. Thus, after her marriage with things external, the soul issues charged with a new motion, appropriate to those external things, and directed upon them; so that a sensitive observer, by the quality of that response, can discern whether the soul has been healthfully fertilized by her experience, or only dissolved and corrupted. In the one case the reaction will be firm and fit, in the other loose, tremulous, and wasted. Almost always, in the sensitive life of animals there is an element of true art and knowledge, together with an element of madness. When the inner heat of the body is excessive (which heat is but rapid and disordered motion) actions and thoughts are bred too hastily, without

attention to things ; then in the shaking hand and rolling eye and words inapt and windy the physician easily recognizes the symptoms of delirium. So even in health the look and (as we say aptly) the air of a man will reveal his ruling passions, every secret impulse causing some deviation or special crowding of the rays that flow from him in moving or looking or speaking. Now these rays, so compacted and directed, are far from odourless. The sweet scent of love is exciting and to one himself amorous is irresistible ; and the scent of anger is acrid, and that of sorrow musty and dank ; the scent of every state of the soul, though nameless, being perfectly distinct. So a soul vibrating in harmony with the things that nourish and solicit her has an aura which, without spreading any sharp odour, refreshes every creature that inhales it, causing the nostrils and the breast to expand joyfully, as if drinking in the sea-breeze or the breath of morning. When, on the contrary, the soul issues from the eyes or lips turbid and clotted, by virtue of the distorted imprints which she bears of all surrounding things, she also stinks ; and she stinks diversely according to the various errors which her rotten constitution has imposed upon her. Hence, though it be a delicate matter and not accomplished without training, it is possible for a practised nose to distinguish the precise quality of a philosopher by his peculiar odour, just as a hound by the mere scent can tell a fox from a boar. And when the hound of philosophy is keen, this is a surer method of dis-

cerning the genuine opinions and true temper of philosophers than are their own words ; for these may be uttered by rote without self-knowledge, or made timidly conformable to fashion or policy ; whereas the trail which, without intention, a mind leaves in passing through the air is a perfect index to its constitution.

Alcibiades. Since you despise argument, pray prove your doctrine by experiment. Smell me, and describe my philosophy.

Democritus. In your case I can perceive nothing at this distance.

Alcibiades (*letting his curly head almost touch the great white beard of Democritus*). There ! is that near enough ?

Democritus. Now I inhale a whole perfumer's shopful of scents, but no intellect.

Alcibiades. Has this sorry Stranger, then, a stronger intellect than mine, that you smell it a furlong off, while mine at three inches is imperceptible ? I discard your philosophy, vain Sage, and pronounce it a delusion.

Democritus. The million have already rejected my discoveries for the same excellent reason. Their conceit is offended, and they refuse to be cured of madness by acknowledging themselves mad. As for the Stranger, odoriferous virtue is not proportional to the mass of the radiating substance, and his intellect need not be greater than yours merely because it carries further. A single skunk, by emitting a little fluid, will qualify space further than a herd of elephants, and one

he-goat browsing amid the crags of the acropolis will neutralise from certain quarters the whole agora full of voting democrats.

Alcibiades. Vain excuses. You are none the less caught and convicted in pretending that you smell ointments in my hair. False impostor, I have not put on anything for two thousand years.

Democritus. What of that? Had you distilled all the pale laurel and asphodel that bloom in this wilderness, sunned only by the mild phosphorescence of some wandering spirit, do you think that such a weak disinfectant could have washed out the traces of those rough young years when you wallowed so recklessly in the mire? Indeed, you have not even taken that precaution, but trusted to sheer time to erase every vestige of the truth. What is time? That which to your sleepy sense seems a long lapse and empty is brief and full in the economy of nature, who has other measures than a fool may find by counting his fingers. To a good eye you would appear still dyed and spotted with every vile pigment and nasty oil with which you have ever beautified yourself, whether on skin or hair.

Dionysius. 'Tis fortunate that in granting us immortality the gods have granted it also to all the ornaments of our life, and that the fragrance of youth envelops our spirits even in this twilight world. Had fate, in making me a phantom, forbidden me to wear a phantom crown, and still to wrap me in this semblance of the silks of Tartary, I should have frankly declined to be immortal,

and would have sunk by preference into the common dust, like a man of no eminence. Happily, the mind is not more stable than its possessions, and as our pleasures fade, life itself fades with them into nothingness.

Aristippus. As for me, I am not aware of having faded. A subtler influence is sufficient to stimulate a subtler organ, and I live as merrily here on wind as I did in Sicily on cakes and onions. There can be nothing more positive than a pleasure, though it be felt by a ghost.

Alcibiades. And so you can actually smell the old stuff?

Democritus. Perfectly: and a very musty combination of stale perfumes it is, and so powerful that it would entirely overwhelm and smother the sweet emanations of intellect, I will not say in you, but even in Empedocles or me or Leucippus, had we ever defiled ourselves with such decoctions.

Alcibiades. You pretend to rail and to denounce my former habits, which were more refined than yours; but I see by your smiling that you are insidiously laying the flattery on me thicker than any unguent, in the vain hope of converting me to your extravagant opinions. For if you could not smell my intellect what would follow? Surely not that I have none, since I am notoriously intelligent, but rather that my mighty intellect is all of that purest sort which, as you have explained, reacts with perfect propriety on everything and is deliciously inodorous.

Democritus. We shall see. Science has means

of penetrating to the most hidden things. Come to me on another day, when there is a high wind blowing; it will drive the coarsely streaming essences of your apothecary all in one direction, which I will avoid; but the effluvia of mind (if any) are far more subtle than the air and cannot be swept aside by its currents, but continue to radiate in all directions, even as the light, without being deflected, cuts through any wind. Thus the scent of your intellect will reach me to the windward of you separate and unalloyed; and may destiny make it sweet. Then you shall know yourself far more surely through my olfactory sense than you ever could by ignorant reasoning and quibbling, after the manner of Socrates.

Dionysius. By my royal authority, venerable Democritus, I forbid you to abuse Socrates, whom the divine Plato, my dear friend and chief of idealists, acknowledges for his master.

Democritus. By your royal leave, chief of dissemblers, I deny that you have any authority, or that Plato ever was your dear friend, or that the doctrine of ideas which he purloined from Socrates is at all precious to you, or more than a pretty fable or play upon words. Not that I am an enemy to idealists, though they be all sworn enemies to me; for I am a friend of nature, and nature is not an enemy to anything that she breeds. Vegetables, too, in so far as they think at all, are dreamers and idealists, and neither nature nor I have any quarrel with vegetables. What can be sweeter than the souls of flowers,

which neither defend their own being nor assert that of anything else? There are human souls also of this innocent sort, which, though highly scented, are far from offensive, because like flowers they diffuse their odours idly, not pretending to describe anything truly, and therefore distorting nothing, but freely disseminating their harmless fancies, like smoke curling in wreaths. Such are the minds of poets and of our voluptuous friends here, Aristippus and Dionysius; and it would be a dull sense indeed that did not perceive their aroma. But blooming is not knowing, and roses and cabbages should not be founders of sects. Your true idealist is rightly convinced that he beholds nothing but specious and vanishing objects, products of his own substance projected outwards by illusion; and with every puff of his humours his dream of a world is transformed in his mind's eye.

Dionysius. Without intending it, you confirm the doctrine of the divine Plato, that the liver is the seat of inspiration.

Democritus. I rejoice in that agreement, all the more that if that saying, as usual, was inspired, it was not the politic Plato who uttered it in his waking mind, but his honestly dreaming liver that uttered it for him. Yet observe this circumstance: the proper secretion of the liver is bile, fit only for internal consumption and bitter if exuded; and so it is also with that other product of the liver, inspiration: a healthful and necessary lubricant of the inner life, in fancy and poetry and

pleasant dreams, but poisonous if exuded in the guise of action or pretended knowledge. You, Dionysius and Aristippus, wisely abstain from such an abuse of your flowering genius: you detest action and laugh at science, and cultivate only exquisite sensation and free discourse. For this reason I find much pleasure in your merry company, without cruelly investigating any opinion which, in an unguarded moment, you may seem to adopt. Would that your masters, Socrates and Plato, had been as wise in this as their disciples! An oracle admonished Socrates to know himself and not to dabble in natural philosophy; and in so far as he obeyed that admonition I honour him. For by self-knowledge he understood knowing his own mind or thoroughly discerning what he meant and what he loved; whereby he framed maxims excellent for the legislator, and fixed the grammar or logic of words. But when, forgetting the oracle, he averred that the sun and moon are products of reason, and are intended for human advantage, he blasphemed against those gods, as if the blood and gall within him, proper to the health of his little body, had burst their bounds and filled the whole heaven. By this presumption he turned his inspiration into sophistry, and what should have been self-knowledge became madness and grotesque errors about the world; and incidentally he showed how unventilated an organ his liver was, and when uncorked out of season how ill-smelling; so that when such a prophet opens his mouth I must hold my nose.

Alcibiades. For that reason, probably, you can smell the Stranger so far off. He is a disciple of Socrates.

Democritus (*sniffing as before*). Not altogether. Oil and water are still being shaken up in that cruet ; and no wonder, for he is still alive.

Dionysius. Still alive, and here ?

Democritus. There are evident symptoms in him of that fever which is called life.

Alcibiades. Very true. At least he himself says so, and professes to have some sort of an old body still toddling on earth.

Aristippus. Why then notice him at all ? Those who are now alive have lost the art of living.

Dionysius. Are there no barriers, no guards to prevent such intrusions ? If such a thing is allowed, what becomes of our seclusion and of our safety ? I appeal to Minos and Rhadamanthus. You remember, Alcibiades, that even purified as you and I were by death and the funeral pyre, we were admitted with difficulty. The thing is incredible, and if true would be scandalous ; and I think the act of spreading such needless alarms should be punishable in our commonwealth.

Democritus. Compose yourself, uneasy tyrant. This visitor, though I can clearly perceive that his substance is still earthly and mutable, comes to us in the spirit only ; his flesh and bones will not intrude here, to disturb the equilibrium of our forms by their rude mass. Nor does alliance with such gross matter render his spirit more

formidable: far otherwise. We are images of bodies long since dispersed, which, being non-existent, cannot send forth different and contrary images to confuse or obliterate those early ones which are our present substance: like a deed done we are safe, and so long as we endure at all we must retain our perfection. His flickering mind, on the contrary, is still receiving constantly fresh effluvia from his earthly body, and lives in a state of perpetual indecision and change. We are like books long written and sealed: he is still in the agonies of composition, and does not know what he will become. His passage near us in these inter-mundane spaces will not affect us; rather will our stable forms impress some trembling reflection of themselves upon his lapsing thoughts, as the huge immovable effigies of Egyptian monarchs are mirrored brokenly in the flowing Nile.

Dionysius. You forget that Heracles stole back Alcestis from the Shades, and that Orpheus and Odysseus and Theseus and other intruders have spread on earth false reports about our condition, much to our dishonour. Even if the impertinent wight cannot injure our persons here, he may tarnish our reputations there. And who knows if by some enchantment or by lying promises he might not entice some one of us to relinquish his fair place in eternity, and escape once more into the living world? Consider the disgrace of that, as if a man by magic should be turned again into a crying and kicking child!

Democritus. How many absurdities can prejudice pack into a few words? You quote the poets as if their fictions were science, you assume that the opinions of mortals can honour or dishonour us, and you dread that life may call you back, and that time may reverse and repeat itself, as if it stammered. But indeed, you are a pupil of the poets, and I must not grudge you the thrills of your fantastic tragedy.

Alcibiades. Why may not Homer and the other poets actually have visited these regions in spirit, as the Stranger is doing to-day? But not being philosophers they shrank from eternity, and depicted our state as shadowy and sad, whereas it is neither sadder nor merrier than material existence, but only safer, being but the truth of that existence, whatever it may have been. As for this Stranger, far from disparaging our condition, he professes to envy it, and slips in thus among us whenever he is able, in order to assimilate his form of being as much as possible to ours.

Aristippus. In that he is wise. I always dwelt in foreign republics, in order to escape the plagues of citizenship; and following my illustrious example, the Stranger exiles himself from earth, in the hope of finding elsewhere more peace and better company. But good company requires a sound wit to enjoy it; and the only maxim for pilgrims is to make merry on the way, for the journey's end may prove disappointing. Is he happy here?

Alcibiades. He is civil enough to say so; but

I suspect that in his heart he is a sort of poet or idealist. The truth, though he may frigidly assent to it, leaves him weary and cold ; and all he asks of the world, be it here or in the realm of mortals, is that it should suffer him to compose a picture of what, to his mind, it ought to have been.

Democritus. If that be the quality of the Stranger's thoughts, let him approach no nearer. Wave him away, Alcibiades, wave him away.

Alcibiades. See how when caught napping you betray the hollowness of your pretences ! You can smell his philosophy only when I report it to you in audible words. You are a rank mythologist, Democritus ; and your fabled scent for philosophies is only a figure of speech, expressing metaphorically those immaterial motions of the thinking mind which only a thinking mind can retrace, and which many words are needed to convey. In saying this—which I declare to be a brief but unanswerable exposure of your fallacies—I have proved not only that I possess an intellect much vaster than the Stranger's (which goes without saying), but also—though before uttering this truth I will retreat to a safe distance—that my scent for philosophies is more sagacious than yours.

Democritus (*laughing*). You hardly believe what you are saying, and yet you are right, quite right. The physician knows madness in one way ; he collects the symptoms of it, the causes, and the cure ; but the madman in his way knows it far

better. The terror and glory of the illusion, which, after all, are the madness itself, are open only to the madman, or to some sympathetic spirit as prone to madness as he. Any madcap may mimic a clown's antics, cleverly taking the mad words out of his mouth and telling him what he might be fool enough to think before he has been fool enough to think it. Such is the art of sophists and demagogues and diviners; an art which perhaps Socrates has taught you, because though he inveighs against it in others he is eminent in it himself. Theirs is a sort of knowledge of illusion, a divination of waking dreams like the player's art, which without penetrating to the causes of appearance, plausibly represents its forms and movement; and in such aping and guessing at human illusions your nimble wit, Alcibiades, is probably quicker than mine, since science has accustomed me to look away from appearance and to consider only the causes of appearance. Now in the sphere of causes illusions and dreams are nothing but streams of atoms; words, too, and systems of philosophy, in the realm of substance, are nothing else; and when a word or a dream or a system of philosophy, having first taken shape in one soul, is by the multiple currents in the aether transmitted to another, this second soul repeats and mimics the dream or word or philosophy native to the first, and in the sphere of illusion may be said to understand it; but neither the soul first begetting that fancy nor the soul repeating it knows anything of

that stream of motions which is its substance. Only the sharp nose of science can follow that aethereal trail. Thus every event in nature, being a moving conjunction of atoms pregnant with destiny, is but an obscure oracle to those who hear in it only a rumble of words, or see it as a painted image. In their ignorance of nature they must piece out each shallow appearance with some shallower presumption, and they are still dreaming when they interpret their dreams. In crowds the poor busy lunatics run down daily to the agora to gather rumours and gossip and to fortify their madness with that of the majority: yet meantime, perhaps, in the solitude of the temple, some silent augur scents the course of the atoms and sees the intent of the gods. To him the scornful smile of Apollo in its radiance brings a joy mixed with terror; he must laugh at the triumph of nature, ever renewed and glorious in the midst of human folly; yet he must tremble at the ruin of his country and of his soul.

Thus in the sphere of nature the whole life of mind is a normal madness. Perception and passion and painted thoughts are all illusions; and all human philosophy, except science reckoning without images, is but madness systematic, putting on a long face. Reason dawns upon mortals only in the last thought of all, when seeing that nothing is real save the atoms and the void (not as fancy may picture them but as they truly are), the mind crowns itself for the supreme sacrifice, and lays down all its flowering illusions

upon the altar of truth. Not that, so long as life lasts, appearance can disappear, or that images and sounding words can cease to flow as in a dream, since these have their substance and perpetual cause in the rhythmic dance and balance of the atoms, which sing that song, like a chorus in a comedy. If there were no appearance there could be no opinion and no knowledge of truth; and true science in discounting appearance does not dismiss appearance, but sees substance through it; for the face of truth cannot be unveiled to mortals by any novelty or exchange of images, but only when in some deep and contrite moment of understanding the mask of ancient illusion becomes transparent altogether, loses its magic without losing its form, and turns into disillusion.

Accordingly, if in calling me a mythologist you, clever rascal, had a playful desire to vex me, you missed your mark. It is not easy to vex a lover of nature. He is already well aware of his own inevitable frailty, and entirely expects that young monkeys, naturally more foolish than himself, should mock him in their wantonness. Believe me, Alcibiades, I would rather have you rail than lisp. Socrates was a bad master for you; by preaching virtue and abstinence he filled you with admiration for his doctrine, but you went on lisping, and were every day softer and more corrupt. Cajolery and eloquence and argument simply propagate prejudice, to which alone they appeal, whereas the truth, if a man saw it, would make him silent. I was indeed a mythologist in

saying that philosophies smell. Scent is only an appearance to me : a philosophy is only an appearance to the philosopher ; and neither can one appearance be a quality of another, nor can any appearance be a part of the substance which produces it. There is a motion of atoms in the sophist and a motion of atoms in me ; yet these pure motions, dreamer that I am, I call and feel to be a foul odour in him and a rising displeasure in myself. What madness is this, that when a plain reality is before me, I behold not that reality but an appearance wholly unlike it ? Yet the night was appointed for dreams, and myths are the joy of children. Let us not quarrel with fate ; but as the myths of Greek poets are truer to nature and sweeter to a healthy mind than the myths of the barbarians, so may the dreams of one philosopher be sweeter and saner than those of another : and with this wisdom I am content, to be sober and frank in my folly.

Alcibiades. You have magnanimously rewarded my gibes with a profound answer which they did not deserve.

Dionysius. Democritus was not replying to you, but like the great mythologist that he professes to be, he was nobly carried away by his own afflatus ; and without pretending to understand what he said (which is probably not intelligible) we were all charmed, I am sure, with the fragrance of his words. There is one phrase in particular which he let fall which I wish he might develop at leisure, I mean *normal madness*. Plato has on

that subject some wonderful and comforting thoughts, showing us the divine wisdom of being sometimes mad; and Euripides in his *Bacchae*, a rapturous and mystical tragedy, has expressed the same truths in action. Let Democritus complete the picture and prove to us on medical grounds the necessity of a divine madness in all men, and especially in himself. It will be a novel discourse, in which comedy and tragedy will be combined with science.

Democritus. Madness is a large subject; it would require a formal disquisition which would weary you all, and especially Aristippus, who does not find enough pleasure in knowledge to deem it a good.

Aristippus. I am indeed indifferent to knowledge, which in itself is neither pleasant nor unpleasant, but I am far from indifferent to your discourses, which are always agreeable; and I should have a particular pleasure in hearing you speak about madness; you would not fail to illustrate the subject amusingly, both by describing the absurdities of others and by exhibiting your own. So pungent and novel a confession should not be missed.

Alcibiades. I join in urging you to consent, for I believe you will show that madness, even if common and inevitable, is not divine, but bestial, and that if a divine inspiration sometimes descends on us in madness, whether in prophecy or love, it comes to dissipate that madness and to heal it; for Socrates says (and, I think, truly) that the best

inspiration that can visit the soul is reason ; and he quotes Homer in support of his opinion, where Hector cries :

"The best of omens is our country's good."

Democritus. A truce to Homer and to Socrates! I have already observed that in the sphere of nature, where there is no better or worse, reason itself is a form of madness, since it comes to establish that vain distinction in obedience to human passions and interests. But the understanding of this matter requires a fresh mind, not cloyed with disputation ; and we will defer it, if you please, to another occasion.

II

VIVISECTION OF A MIND

Alcibiades. With some difficulty, O Sage of Abdera, I have led back the Stranger into your presence, because he had overheard you expressing the intention of separating him into his elements ; and although the vivisection is to be of the spirit only, and will not kill him, he fears it may hurt his feelings.

Democritus. He deserves to suffer, if he is not willing to discover how he is composed. A philosopher cannot wish to wear a mask in his own eyes or in those of the world, nor can he be ashamed of being what he is, since the scorn or the praises of men are but unsubstantial opinions, foolish and only important to themselves ; and he knows that he too is a part of nature, entirely explicable and necessary.

The Stranger. In this as in much else, venerable Sage, I am your convinced disciple, and neither ashamed to be what I am nor averse from knowing it. Nevertheless, there are garments which those who are not young or beautiful do well to wear not because they wish to deceive themselves or others concerning their bodily form or infirmities,

but because it is not seemly to display without necessity things not pleasing to the eye ; and I fear that my thoughts, in this exalted society, may not seem worthy of exposure.

Democritus. Be reassured. I know that Alcibiades is already your friend ; and if Dionysius or Aristippus, who are frivolous wits, should mock you in an unmannerly fashion, they shall be severely rebuked and restrained by me. To the physician the diseases which the vulgar call loathsome, and the animals which they call reptiles and worms, are all worthy of attentive study ; and even if you seemed a monster to human convention, to the eye of science you would be neither ridiculous nor unexpected.

The Stranger. No : but I might be commonplace and unimportant, and therefore better left in the shade.

Democritus. You would not have found your way into this placid heaven if you did not love the light ; and if you love the light, why should you fear it ? Let me observe at once, in order to encourage you, that in one respect you are no ordinary person, since you are my disciple. Superstition is as rife in your time as it was in mine. The vapours of vanity exuding from the brain if blown away here must gather there into some new phantom for fools to worship ; and it requires courage to stand alone, smiling at those inevitable follies, and recognizing the immense disproportion between nature and man, and her reptilian indifference to her creatures. They are

of her own substance, indeed, which must return to her undiminished : and meantime she spawns them without remorse at their hard and ephemeral fortunes. Even her favours are ironical ; and if she lend anybody strength, unless it be the strength of reason, it serves only to prolong his agony, and enable him to trample more cruelly and obstinately on all the rest. The severity of reason in disabusing us of these vain passions shows true kindness to the soul ; nor is it a morose severity, but paternal and indulgent towards every amiable pleasure ; for nature is nothing but the sum of her creatures, and laughs and rejoices in them mightily when they are beautiful and strong. Of these triumphs of nature in us true philosophy is the greatest, by which she understands herself. You, in becoming my disciple, have tasted something of that purest joy ; and not only have become in that measure excellent and unassailable, but any morbid or rotten parts that may remain in you by accident should be objects of indifference and cold observation to you, as not portions of your free mind ; and if by my help you can disown and extirpate them, you will never again have cause to blush or to tremble, I will not say before men, but before the gods and the decrees of fate. Much less need you tremble before us here, who are but shades and wraiths of the thinnest atoms. We shall be grateful to you even for your vices ; they will have the savour of the living world, which the gods love to inhale ; and in you we

shall see a specimen of the fauna, curious if not beautiful, that flourishes to-day.

The Stranger. I am afraid that even in that capacity I am not worth dissecting. I have been a stranger in all my dwelling-places, and I should hardly have strayed into this sanctuary if I had been a man of my own time.

Democritus. You are mistaken. Small differences, at close quarters, seem to you great; in reality you are but one leaf in the tree. That you should turn for comfort to our pallid sun is no wonder: all your souls are in the dark; you have bred a monstrous parasite that envelops you, and cuts off your own sunlight. How astonishing this tree of yours looks at a distance, the giant of the ages, with its crown of unheard-of tentacles, like streaming grasses, spreading far into the aether! But on inspection what a flimsy marvel it all is, how sterile and unhappy! These far-reaching organs are but machines; they drop no seeds; they have no proper life; and the sad stump on which they are grafted, your naked human nature, must supply them all with sap, else in one season they would shrivel and drop to pieces, nor would the least plan or the least love of them subsist anywhere in nature, whence they might be reborn. Meantime the proper fruits and seeds of your species are lost or stunted, and it is doubtful whether mankind, smothered under its inventions and tools, will not dry up at the root and perish with them.

The Stranger. I do not think so. The tools

and those pale men and nations that are the slaves of tools will no doubt disappear in time; such arts have probably been invented and lost many times before. But there is a lusty core in the human animal that survives all revolutions; and when the conflagration is past, I seem to see the young hunters with their dogs, camping among the ruins.

Democritus. Human wit is seldom to be trusted in prophecy. The mind thinks in gaudy images and nature moves in dark currents of molecular change, careless whether those images repeat themselves or not like rhymes. What is your present plight? Dispersion and impotence of soul. Here a vein of true knowledge; there a vestige of prudent morality; perhaps a secret love; idle political principles that alienate you from politics; a few luxurious and vapid arts; and, poisoning the rest of your economy, the taint of antique superstition, for which you have no antidote. The wonder is that you exist at all, for life demands some measure of harmony.

The Stranger. May there not be a kind of harmony in non-interference, when each circle in the state or each interest of the mind lives its inner life apart, yet in things indifferent and external they pull well enough together, like the team of a four-horse chariot?

Democritus. Four horses are by nature four separate bodies, which only the reins and harness have yoked together, whereas in a well-ordered city or in a living mind all the parts form one system by a vital necessity; unless, indeed, as

seems to be the case with you, that mind or that city is not a living unit at all, but a colony. You think appearance pleasant and important, but substance you think unimportant and unpleasant: an accident which could not befall you if you had a whole soul.

The Stranger. I wish I might find appearance always pleasant and important; but as to substance, since the better and the worse are a part of appearance, is not substance necessarily indifferent?

Democritus. There is indeed no wisdom like that of the atoms, which, being compelled to move by fate, move without caring whither. But when by this very motion life and will have arisen, and the foolish heart must be set on something, it is the part of a relative wisdom to set it on the truth. Such was my good fortune, and in some measure that of my nation. Now circumstances have condemned you to be all your lives students of error, of sensation, fiction, fancy, and false philosophies; by all of which your spirits, if not deceived, have been sadly bemused. You are content at best to salute the truth from a distance, with a facile gesture; you have never delved in her garden or eaten her wholesome fruits; and if ever she opens her divine lips and vouchsafes to address you, you begin to mumble to yourselves some old canticle till you fall asleep.

The Stranger. Is not the truth about error a part of the truth? Can the living, whose whole life is a dream, know any other part of it?

Democritus. The dreamer can know no truth, not even about his dream, except by awaking out of it. If you spin one dream to explain another, as do your talking philosophers, how will you ever come out of the labyrinth? The physician, who is the only veritable soothsayer, will inquire concerning your diet, and the causes of your dream, and will perhaps dispel those vapours. There is no other truth to be learned from dreams, and the science of them is also a medicine.

Alcibiades. When I was a child and learned Homer by heart, I became, so to speak, his pupil in my dreams; and that was a benefit to me, because some dreams are better than others, and Homer's are the best. The Stranger has had many masters of that kind, and he may have learned the truth about them merely by comparing one with another and, all within the realm of dreams, perceiving which was best. That is a truth about them, as it seems to me, more important than their causes.

Democritus. Is the nature of truth known to you, young man, that you can tell whether the Stranger, in preferring one dream to another, discerns a truth or not? Are you not both of you habitually employed in jesting and scoffing and making fanciful speeches? How many times, for once that you mention the atoms and the void, do you not mention beauty?

Alcibiades. Beauty, as Socrates would prove to you if you would listen, is the truest of things.

Democritus. Nonsense. Beauty is a fleeting

appearance ; and though the Stranger (wiser, I admit, in this respect than either you or Socrates) knows that it is an appearance, he nevertheless cherishes it more than reality : such is the mixture of waking and dreaming, of health and rottenness, in his composition.

The Stranger. Can the surgeon's knife, Democritus, separate appearance from reality ?

Democritus. No, indeed : and I am far from blaming you for seeing the beautiful, when the atoms passing in clouds before your eyes or through the ventricles of your body waft the scent of beauty upon you : it is not your fault that they do so. I too must see colours in the flowers and must hear the sweet warbling of the fountain or the flute. But when I see them I mock them, and when I hear them I remember faithfully the true causes of sound : because though I am alive and must behold appearances, I am sane and can know reality. But you, my friend, are too often delirious ; and though that is a frequent accident in fever and in dreams, it is a disgrace to a professed philosopher and a nuisance to a man of sense.

The Stranger. I confess that sometimes the fair vision intercepts my reason, and the passers-by point at me in derision for standing amazed at nothing in particular and seeing gods in the commonest creatures. It is as if the light of sense were a divine medium on which the moving matter of things could make no other impression than to evoke their eternal forms.

Democritus. I know, I know. Moonstruck in the sunshine. It is a bad symptom.

Alcibiades. Is this circumstance of being subject to pleasant trances the only disease that you discover in the Stranger ?

Democritus. Not at all : out of consideration to a guest I have begun with the least obnoxious. Sensation is in itself a symptom of health, coming when the body passes from rest to some appropriate action ; and a trance is but the momentary suspension of this action, the tension which prepares it alone remaining : and in a lazy man, whose actions in any case are slow and trivial, such suspension makes no great difference. Yet a philosopher cannot be subject to trances with impunity. Dwelling fondly on images, he very likely will say to himself that they are not only lovelier than substance, but somehow surer and more exalted ; and who knows what metaphysical nonsense he will presently be talking about them, as if inspired ? Is not the Stranger a disciple of Plato as well as of me ?

The Stranger. Indeed I am, but without contradiction. In respect to the substance and origin of things I profess allegiance to you only : in such matters Plato, knowing his own ignorance, was always playful, inventing or repeating such myths as he thought edifying for children or for patriots. Yet when he closed his eyes on this inconstant world he was a great seer. I honour and follow him for what then he saw, which was a heaven of ideas, rich in constellations ; I disregard the trick

of words or the superstitious impulse by which he added something which he certainly could not see, namely, that those ideas were substances and powers ruling the world. Such a notion is not only false to the facts but vapid in logic. Things take what shapes they can, as a poet bubbles with the words of his mother-tongue which his present passion evokes : the words chosen cannot have chosen him or created his passion. So without deeming words sacred or ideas magical I am a friend of both, and I wait for the flux of matter to bring them to light as it will in its infinite gyrations.

Alcibiades. Why are you displeased with a fair answer ? Philosophers are as jealous as women ; each wants a monopoly of praise.

Democritus. I am not jealous of Venus ; you may praise the meretricious Muse of a Plato as much as you please ; but I warn you as a physician that these rapturous fancies are signs of a feeble health : they comport effeminacy in action.

Dionysius (*aside to Aristippus*). Now that he has touched on effeminacy he will soon be railing at us also. Any refined nature seems effeminate to the old savage.

Democritus. Yes, my royal friend, although I cannot hear you plainly, I know what you are murmuring. You may apply all that I am about to say to your own person and regard yourself as accused and convicted. Yet the Stranger's is the worse case. You at least were a king, Aristippus was an adventurer, Alcibiades was the equal of

kings and the seducer of queens. All three of you could flaunt your effeminacy upon a public stage, your masquerade became a sort of action, you threw your all into the fray and made a gallant pose of your treason. But a private and obscure person like the Stranger has only his small heart in which to display his inventions, and must be more deeply and silently consumed by their vanity. Man is a fighting animal, his thoughts are his banners, and it is a failure of nerve in him if they are only thoughts. A philosopher especially, whatever his birth or station, is commissioned by the gods. He may raise his voice against folly ; in his own person he may be stern, stripping himself bare of all human entanglements. Ferocity becomes him, as it does the lion ; and if no man will be his companion in a life of virtue, he can resolutely walk alone. His mere example will be a power, or if not, at least his self-assertion will be an action. But if he sits in his closet, fancifully rebuilding the universe or reforming the state, he is little better than a maniac ; or if in sauntering through the market-place and observing its villainies, because his nook is safe and his liver is in good order, he tolerates the spectacle, he is like a woman in the theatre shuddering at the tragedy and eating sweets.

Aristippus. Wise man too, if he does so. I pronounce it worthier of a philosopher to eat sweets than to count the number of the atoms, and less foolish to smile or to shudder at the world than to attempt to reform it. If in watching such

an inglorious tragedy and such a dull comedy as the earth presents in his day, the Stranger can still be merry and relish his small comforts, I beg to be allowed to honour him for his good nature. Do not think, excellent Traveller, that among the Shades all philosophers are scolds, singly bent on browbeating people into a meddlesome virtue which is always half criminal. There is wisdom here of another stripe, and if you bravely make the best of a crazy world, eternity is full of champions that will defend you.

The Stranger. Both of you, Democritus and Aristippus, seem to me to have spoken justly : in your censure and encouragement alike there is good counsel, and I thank you both for your words. Intrepid virtue, O Sage of Abdera, is a gift of the gods, and how often do they bestow it ? You yourself were no Pythagoras, nor even a Diogenes. As for me, disillusion was my earliest friend, and never were chagrin and hope strong enough to persuade me that anything was to be gained by rebelling against fortune. Men may sometimes destroy what they hate : that will be a ferocious joy to them, although perhaps a sorrow to others more reasonable than they. But never by any possibility can men establish what they love ; once there, the dreamt-of object is another and a ghastly thing. Unless, then, they are to fret away their lives in impotent hatred, the living must find something amiable in things transitory and imperfect, the fruits of circumstance and of custom. We are such fruits ourselves, and our

hearts have no prerogative in the large household of nature. Each of us indeed has his animal strength, and, if he has unravelled them, his constant loves ; and the way always lies open to adventure and sometimes to art. Had there been some wise prophet in my day, summoning mankind to an ordered and noble life, I should gladly have followed him, not having myself the gift of leadership. I should not have asked him for the absolute truth nor for an earthly paradise ; I should have been content with a placid monastery dedicated to study or with a camp of comrades in the desert. But I found no master. Those who beat the drum or rang the church-bell in my time were unhappy creatures, trying to deceive themselves. Better not be a hero than work oneself up into heroism by shouting lies. Green, quiet places and boyish sports are more moralizing than these moralists. I should honour heroic virtue if it were sane and beneficent ; but I find satisfaction also, and perhaps oftener, in little things.

Dionysius. Experience speaks through the Stranger's mouth. In my varied life I ran the whole gamut of human occupations and pleasures and, among them all, I remember now with the greatest satisfaction those which came unasked and departed unregretted, like my kingly crown. The beautiful is a wingèd essence, and a wise Psyche does not seek to detain her lover.

Alcibiades. Democritus, who is the wisest of us here, nevertheless demands a bold spirit ; it may be but a more impetuous vortex of atoms,

yet there is a hazard in it more glorious than slackness. I think it a defect of nature in a man with a clear mind not to have also an imperious will: knowing his most secret and profound desires and seeing his opportunities he should leap to the goal. My conclusion is, then, that to love the beautiful, even if it be only an appearance, is no disease in the Stranger or in any other creature, but it is indeed a disease not to love glory and material dominion.

Democritus. Disease is a word employed conventionally; it has no meaning in nature. Neither the Stranger nor a dead dog suffers any corruption, if his present state or immediate promise be the standard for his perfection: happy they if they relish their fate. I was speaking of a philosopher, whose perfection is set on knowledge of the truth and on friendship with nature. The Stranger admits that nothing is beautiful in itself, yet he cultivates the illusion that many things are beautiful; he confesses that a barbarous life is an evil to his soul, yet he condones the barbarism of the world, and pleases himself in it. I therefore conclude that his is a torpid organism, disjointed, and incapable of fighting its way victoriously to the easement of its own lusts. To an eye that follows the multiform life of nature, a whole lion is nobler than half a man.

The Stranger. And for this pitiful lameness in my soul, can you propose a remedy?

Democritus. Yes, if you will allow me to change your ancestors, your bodily complexion,

your breeding, and the time and place of your existence. On that condition, I agree to obliterate every trace of disease or sluggishness in your constitution.

The Stranger. I salute that admirable being, designed by Democritus, that should have borne my name, and I wish him a glorious life, if ever he arises. Meantime I beg leave to go and finish on earth the allotted term of my present illness, and I bid my incomparable doctor farewell, until another visit.

Alcibiades (*aside to the Stranger, as the latter prepares to depart*). You see that you had nothing to fear. The old man has cut you up without hurting you.

The Stranger. The operation was unnecessary, and has not been painless, but I might have fallen into worse hands. It is a new form of health to be inured to disease, and in that sense, like a true wonder-worker, this physician has sent me away cured.

III

NORMAL MADNESS

Democritus. You reappear in season, inquisitive Pilgrim, and to-day you must take a seat beside me. These young men are compelling my hoary philosophy to disclose the cause of all the follies that they perpetrated when alive. They still wear, as you see, their youthful and lusty aspect; for when we enter these gates Minos and Rhadamanthus restore to each of us the semblance of that age at which his spirit on earth had been most vivid and masterful and least bent by tyrant circumstance out of its natural straightness. Therefore Alcibiades and Dionysius and Aristippus walk here in the flower of their youth, and I sit crowned with all the snows and wisdom of extreme old age; because their souls, though essentially noble, grew daily more distracted in the press of the world and more polluted, but mine by understanding the world grew daily purer and stronger. They are still ready for every folly, though luckily they lack the means; and the chronicle of vanity remains full of interest for them, because they are confident of shining in it. Yet the person whom this subject most

nearly touches is you, since you are still living, and life is at once the quintessence and the sum of madness. Here our spirits can be mad only vicariously and at the second remove, as the verses in which Sophocles expresses the ravings of Ajax are themselves sanely composed, and a calm image of horror. But your thoughts, in the confusion and welter of existence, are still rebellious to metre ; you cannot yet rehearse your allotted part, as we do here, with the pause and pomp of a posthumous self-knowledge. My discourse on madness, therefore, will not only celebrate your actions, but may open your eyes ; and I assign to you on this occasion the place of honour, as nearest of kin to the goddess Mania, who to-day presides over our games.

There is little philosophy not contained in the distinction between things as they exist in nature, and things as they appear to opinion ; yet both the substance and its appearance often bear the same name, to the confusion of discourse. So it is with the word madness, which sometimes designates a habit of action, sometimes an illusion of the mind, and sometimes only the opprobrium which a censorious bystander may wish to cast upon either.

Moralists and ignorant philosophers like Socrates—of whom women and young men often think so highly—do not distinguish nature from convention, and because madness is inconvenient to society they call it contrary to nature. But nothing can be contrary to nature ; and that a

man should shriek or see wild visions or talk to the air, or to a guardian genius at his elbow, or should kill his children and himself, when the thing actually occurs, is not contrary to nature, but only to the habit of the majority. The diseases which destroy a man are no less natural than the instincts which preserve him. Nature has no difficulty in doing what she does, however wonderful or horrible it may seem to a fancy furnished only with a few loose images and incapable of tracing the currents of substance ; and she has no hostility to what she leaves undone and no longing to do it. You will find her in a thousand ways unmaking what she makes, trying again where failure is certain, and neglecting the fine feats which she once easily accomplished, as if she had forgotten their secret. How simple it was once to be a Greek and ingenuously human ; yet nature suffered that honest humanity to exist only for a few doubtful years. It peeped once into being, like a weed amid the crevices of those Aegean mountains, and all the revolving aeons will not bring it back. Nature is not love-sick ; she will move on ; and if to the eye of passion her works seem full of conflict, vanity, and horror, these are not horrors, vanities, or conflicts to her. She is no less willing that we should be mad than that we should be sane. The fly that prefers sweetness to a long life may drown in honey ; nor is an agony of sweetness forbidden by nature to those inclined to sing or to love.

Moral terms are caresses or insults and describe

nothing; but they have a meaning to the heart, and are not forbidden. You may, therefore, without scientific error, praise madness or deride it. Your own disposition and habit will dictate these judgements. A weak and delicate animal like man could have arisen only in an equable climate, in which at all seasons he might hunt and play, and run naked or gaily clad according to his pleasure: he therefore at first regards the Hyperborean regions, where summer and winter are sharply contrasted, as cruel and uninhabitable; yet if by accident or necessity he becomes hardened to those changes, he begins to think his native forests pestiferous and fit only for snakes and monkeys. So it is also with the climates of the mind. Every nation thinks its own madness normal and requisite; more passion and more fancy it calls folly, less it calls imbecility. Of course, according to nature, to possess no fancy and no passion is not to possess too little, and a stone is no imbecile; while to have limitless passion and fancy is not to have too much, and a drone among bees or a poet among men is not a fool for being all raptures. In the moralist aspiration is free to look either way. If some gymnosophist sincerely declares that to move or to breathe or to think is vanity, and that to become insensible is the highest good, in that it abolishes illusion and all other evils, to him I object nothing; if starkness is his treasure, let him preserve it. If on the other hand Orpheus or Pythagoras or Plato, having a noble contempt for the body,

aspire to soar in a perpetual ecstasy, and if with their eyes fixed on heaven they welcome any accidental fall from a throne or from a housetop as a precious liberation of their spirits, fluttering to be free, again I oppose nothing to their satisfaction: let them hug Icarian madness to their bosoms, as being the acme of bliss and glory.

What, Aristippus and Dionysius, are you so soon asleep? I confidently expected you at this point to applaud my oration. But sleep on, if you prefer dreams to an understanding of dreams.

Perhaps you others, whose wits are awake, may ask me how, if in nature there be nothing but atoms in motion, madness comes to exist at all. I will not reply that motion and division are themselves insanity, although wise men have said so; for if division and motion are the deepest nature of things, insanity would be rather the vain wish to impose upon them unity and rest. For by sanity I understand assurance and peace in being what one is, and in becoming what one must become; so that the void and the atoms, unruffled and ever ready, are eminently sane. Not so, however, those closed systems which the atoms often form by their cyclical motion: these systems are automatic; they complete and repeat themselves by an inward virtue whenever circumstances permit; yet even when circumstances do not permit, they madly endeavour to do so. This mad endeavour, when only partially defeated, may restore and propagate itself with but slight variations, and it is then called life. Of life

madness is an inseparable and sometimes a predominant part: every living body is mad in so far as it is inwardly disposed to permanence when things about it are unstable, or is inwardly disposed to change when, the circumstances being stable, there is no occasion for changing. That which is virtue in season is madness out of season, as when an old man makes love ; and Prometheus or Alexander attempting incredible feats is a miracle of sanity, if he attempts them at the right moment.

So much for madness in action, inevitable whenever the impulses of bodies run counter to opportunity. But life, both in its virtue and in its folly, is also expressed in fancy, creating the world of appearance. In the eye of nature all appearance is vain and a mere dream, since it adds something to substance which substance is not ; and it is no less idle to think what is true than to think what is false. If ever appearance should become ashamed of being so gratuitous and like an old gossip should seek to excuse its garrulity by alleging its truth, neither the void nor the atoms would heed that excuse or accept it. Are they, forsooth, insecure that they should call upon that sleepy witness to give testimony to their being ? Their being is indomitable substance and motion and action, and to add thought, impalpable and ghostly, is to add madness. Indeed fancy as if aware of its vanity, makes holiday as long as it can ; its joy is in fiction, and it would soon fade and grow weary if it had to tell the truth. The

heroes in the *Iliad*, instead of doing a man's work in silence, like honest atoms, love to recite their past exploits and to threaten fresh deeds of blood: had they respected reality they would have been content to act, but they must prate and promise, because they live by imagination. If their boasts are lies, as is probable, they are all the more elated. These fools might almost have perceived their own idiocy, if they had merely described their true actions, saying, "I am standing on two legs; I am hurling a spear, I am running away, I am lying flat and dead on the ground." The truth, my friends, is not eloquent, except unspoken; its vast shadow lends eloquence to our sparks of thought as they die into it. After all there was some sense in that nonsense of Socrates about the sun and moon being governed by reason, for they go their rounds soberly, without talking or thinking.

That the intoxication of life is the first cause of appearance you have all observed and experienced when you have danced in a chorus, or performed your military exercises, stamping on the ground in unison and striking your swords together; ordered motion being naturally fertile in sound, in flashing light, and in gladness. Such appearances, in the safe and liberal life of a god, would not be deceptive, since a god need not be concerned about his own existence, which is secure, or that of other things, which is indifferent, and he is not tempted to assert falsely, as men do, that sound and splendour and gladness are the

substance of those things or of himself. In him the intoxication of life in creating appearance would not create illusion, but only an innocent and divine joy. Accordingly, when the voice of a god traverses the air, the burden of it is neither true nor false ; only the priest or the people, anxiously interpreting that oracle according to their fears and necessities, render false or true by their presumption such scraps of it as they may hear. The god, however, was not mindful of them but was singing to himself his own song. This divine simplicity of nature is ill understood by mortals, who address everything to their mean uses and vain advantage ; whereby in the struggle to lengthen their days a little they fill them with distraction.

This is a third and most virulent form of madness, in which the dreams of the vegetative soul are turned into animal error and animal fury. For animals cannot wait for the slow ministrations of earth and air, but as you see in birds and kittens and young children, must be in a fidget to move ; prying in all directions and touching and gobbling everything within reach. This is their only entertainment, for they have lost all fine inner sensibility, and their feelings and fancies arise only when their whole soul is addressed to external things of which they are necessarily ignorant—for what can a simpleton know of the streams of atoms actually coursing about him ? His mind is furnished only with feelings and images generated within, but being

distracted by the urgency of his lusts and fears, he takes those images and feelings for pleasant lures or fantastic and stalking enemies. Thus whereas locomotion by itself would be unconscious and fancy by itself would be innocent and free from error, fancy married with locomotion, as it must be in the strife of animals, begets false opinion and wraps the naked atoms in a veil of dreams.

Such is the origin of opinion ; and as the chief endeavour of the animal body is to defend and propagate itself at all costs, so the chief and most lasting illusion of the mind is the illusion of its own importance. What madness to assert that one collocation of atoms or one conjunction of feelings is right or is better, and another is wrong or is worse ! Yet this baseless opinion every living organism emits in its madness, contradicting the equal madness of all its rivals. They say the stars laugh at us for this, but what is their own case ? The sun and the planets may seem to gaping observation to lead a sane life, having found paths of safety ; yet to the sharp eye of science the ambush is visible into which they glide. If they think themselves immortal gods, and feast and laugh together as they revolve complacently, they are mad, because a sudden surprise awaits them, and the common doom. Had they been wise, like philosophers who know themselves mortal, they should have consented and made ready to die, seeing that they are not pure atoms or the pure void, and that in forming them nature

was not in earnest but playing. They would have done well to laugh, if they had laughed at themselves ; for those who will not laugh with nature in her mockery and playfulness, turn her sport first into delusion and then into anguish.

Such being the nature and causes of madness, is there no remedy for it ? In answering this question I broach the second and kindlier part of my discourse, when having described the disease I bring hope of health and prescribe the cure. A radical cure, though it exists, I will not propose to you, for you are young and inquisitive and not ready to renounce all life and all knowledge. Only some great and heroic sage can begin by disowning madness altogether and felling the tree of opinion at the root ; nor would he, by leaping into total salvation, attain to any understanding of his former distress. In abolishing illusion he would have forgotten its existence and virtually denied it ; so that for the blatant errors of his lusty years he would have substituted one great mute and perpetual error : the total ignorance which besets the atoms regarding the patterns and the dreams which in fact they generate. Suddenly to renounce all madness is accordingly to miss the truth about madness, together with the whole comic rout of this world, which is marvellously fertile in comedy.

My physic accordingly will be more gentle ; I will not prescribe instant death as the only medicine. Wisdom is an evanescent madness, when the dream still continues but no longer

deceives. In all illusions there is some truth, since being products of nature they all have some relation to nature, and a prudent mind by lifting their masks may discover their true occasions. Doubtless the number and swiftness of the atoms, even in a little space, must always elude human discernment; but the more foolish images of sense may be disallowed in favour of others more faithful to the true rhythms and divisions of nature. Thus to the innocent eye the six stout spokes of a chariot-wheel revolving rapidly are merged and blurred in one whirling disc; but the philosopher, though no less subject than other men to this illusion, on seeing the disc will remember the spokes, and in all his fevers and griefs will be mindful of the atoms; his forced illusions will not deceive him altogether, since he knows their cause, and it is in his power, if the worst befall, by a draught of atoms artfully mingled, to dispel all his griefs and fevers for ever. Meantime, in the interests of human life, without inquiring into its ultimate vanity, a conventional distinction may be drawn between madness and sanity. Belief in the imaginary and desire for the impossible will justly be called madness; but those habits and ideas will be conventionally called sane which are sanctioned by tradition and which, when followed, do not lead directly to the destruction of oneself or of one's country. Such conventional sanity is a normal madness like that of images in sense, love in youth, and religion among nations.

Two protecting deities, indeed, like two sober

friends supporting a drunkard, flank human folly and keep it within bounds. One of these deities is Punishment, and the other Agreement. The very mad man chokes, starves, runs into the sea, or having committed some fearful rape or murder is sentenced to death by the magistrate. Even if harmless, he is tied with a chain, and dies like a dog in his kennel. Punishment thus daily removes the maddest from the midst of mankind. The remnant, though their thoughts be in their homely way still dull or fantastic, then plod on in relative safety, while the unhappy souls whom Punishment has overtaken rest from their troubles. For no sooner has the system of atoms forming an animal body lost its equilibrium and been dispersed in death, than no pain or fancy or haggard hope subsists in that system any longer, and the peace of indifference and justice returns to the world ; and if here or in the memory of men some echo of that life reverberates, it rings without anguish, the note once sounded repeating itself perpetually, pure and undisturbed. This is the good work which Punishment does daily, healing and harmonizing the worst of follies.

Yet before dying in the arms of Punishment madness may be mitigated and tamed by Agreement, like a young colt broken in and trained to gallop in harness. The automatism of life, which is necessarily spontaneous and blind, may by adjustment with its occasions become a principle of health and genius, the parent of noble actions and beautiful works. Fancy, too, in creating

images which have no originals in nature—since in nature there is nothing but atoms and the void —may by union with the times and order of natural events become the mother of names, pleasant and familiar, by which those events are called in the language of sense. Thus the most diverse imaginations in various species of animals may be rendered compatible with sagacity and with a prosperous life. Migratory fowl do not record their voyages in books, like human geographers, yet they have appointed dreams and secret sensations which warn them of the season for flight, and they are well informed about Egypt without consulting Herodotus. If omens were observed scientifically and not superstitiously interpreted, augury might be a true art of substitution, like language. There are many false tales told both by Greeks and barbarians which at times are useful to the state, because by an artful disposition of signs and sounds they dispose the inner parts of men favourably for breasting labour or war. Thus the most deed-dyed illusion, if it be interwoven with good habits, may flourish in long amity with things, naming and saluting them, as we do the stars, or the gods, without understanding their nature.

Such amity can the god Agreement establish even between aliens, but between brothers he weaves a subtler and a sweeter bond. For when kindred bodies have the same habitat and the same arts they also have the same illusions ; and their common madness gives to each a perfect

knowledge of the other's mind. Whereas the images in the eye or the thoughts of the heart can agree but loosely and, as it were, politically with material things, they may agree exactly with the images in another eye, and the thoughts of another heart. This free unanimity was called friendship by the Greeks, who alone of all nations have understood the nature of friendship. Barbarians of course may fight faithfully in bands, and may live in tribes and in cities, hugging their wives and children to their bosom; but such instinctive love, which all animals manifest, is not friendship. It moves in the realm of nature, and concerns only action and fate, whereas friendship is agreement in madness, when the same free thoughts and the same fraternal joys visit two kindred spirits. It was not for fighting loyally side by side that the Spartan phalanx or the Theban band were incomparable in the annals of war, but for fighting side by side for the sake of the beautiful, and in order that the liberal madness of their friendship might not end, unless it ended in death. All the glories of Greece are the fruits of this friendship and belong to the realm of madness tempered by Agreement; for out of the very fountain of madness Apollo and the Muses drew that intoxication which they taught to flow in the paths of health and of harmony. The Greeks in the intervals between their wars, instead of sinking into luxury and sloth, or into a vain industry, instituted games, in which peace was made keen and glorious by a

beautiful image of war. Actual war is a conflict of matter with matter, as blind as it is inevitable ; but the images which it breeds survive in peace, as we survive in these removed spaces after the battle of existence. So even the wisest when alive play with images and interests, and the glitter of many rival opinions hides the deep harmony with nature by which these opinions live. There is sweetness and quaint reason in these frail thoughts of our after-life, as in the wisdom of children. What could be madder than a ghost ? Yet by the harmony which each of us has long since attained with himself, and by the freedom and peace which we gladly grant to one another, we immortalize the life of friendship and share it with the gods.

Let such, then, be my discourse upon madness. Philosophers are unjust to the madness of the vulgar, and the vulgar to that of madmen and philosophers, not seeing how plausible a substitute it is for their own, because everybody thinks himself sane ; wherein precisely shines his blinding illusion. I have wished in a manner to remove the mystery and the odium from this universal predicament of mortals, and to show it to be no anomaly. Madness is natural and, like all things natural, it loves itself, and often, by its innocence or by its signification, it lives in harmony with the rest of nature ; otherwise, by the action it comports, it finds its quietus in punishment and death.

Alcibiades. Your discourse, indomitable Sage,

has filled us all with wonder, and left us without the wish to speak. The Stranger, if he had dared, should have broken this silence rather than I, for you tell us that madness comes of being alive, and very likely he thinks that such an opinion comes of being dead.

Democritus. Very likely, but let him speak for himself.

The Stranger. I should not hesitate to do so if I had anything to object to so persuasive a discourse, but words on my part are superfluous, since I recognize the truth of every part of it. To show you, however, that the living are not always unwilling to confess their plight, I will repeat an old story of the sort which we compose for children. It seems curiously to confirm all that the noble Democritus has taught us.

Once upon a time, so the story runs, the whole world was a garden in which a tender fair-haired child, whose name was Autologos, played and babbled alone. There was, indeed, an old woman who tended the garden, a goddess in disguise; but she lived in a cave and came out only at night when the child was asleep, for like the bat and the astronomer she could see better in the dark. She had a sharp pruning-hook on a very long pole, with which she silently pruned every tree and shrub in the garden, even the highest branches, cutting off the dead twigs and shaking down the yellow leaves in showers; and often, muttering surly words to herself which were not intelligible, she would cut off some flower or some bud as

well, so that when the child awoke he missed them and could not imagine what had become of them. Now the child in his play gave names to everything that he liked or disliked ; and the rose he called Beauty, and the jasmin Pleasure, and the hyacinth Sweetness, and the violet Sadness, and the thistle Pain, and the olive Merit, and the laurel Triumph, and the vine Inspiration. He was highly pleased with all these names, and they made those flowers and plants so much more interesting to him, that he thought those names were their souls. But one day, having pricked himself with the thorns of a rose, he changed her name to Love ; and this caused him to wonder why he had given those particular names to everything rather than quite different names ; and the child began to feel older. As he sat brooding on this question, for he had stopped playing, a man in a black gown came into the garden who was a botanist, and said : " It matters little what names you give to flowers because they already have scientific names which indicate their true genera and species ; the rose is only a rose, and is neither Beauty nor Love ; and so with all the other flowers. They are flowers and plants merely, and they have no souls." Hearing this the child began to cry, very much to the botanist's annoyance, for being a busy man he disliked emotion. " After all," he added, " those names of yours will do no harm, and you may go on using them if you please ; for they are prettier than those which truly describe the flowers, and

much shorter ; and if the word soul is particularly precious to you, you may even say that plants and flowers have souls : only, if you wish to be a man and not always a child, you must understand that the soul of each flower is only a name for its way of life, indicating how it spreads its petals in the morning and perhaps closes them at night, as you do your eyes. You must never suppose, because the flower has a soul, that this soul does anything but what you find the flower actually doing." But the child was not comforted, and when the wind had dried his tears, he answered : " If I cannot give beautiful names to the plants and flowers which shall be really their souls, and if I cannot tell myself true tales about them, I will not play in the garden any more. You may have it all to yourself and botanize in it, but I hate you." And the child went to sleep that night quite flushed and angry. Then, as silently as the creeping moonlight, the old woman came out of her cave and went directly to the place where the child was sleeping, and with a great stroke of her pruning-knife cut off his head ; and she took him into her cave and buried him under the leaves which had fallen on that same night, which were many. When the botanist returned in the morning and found the child gone he was much perplexed. " To whom," said he to himself, " shall I now teach botany ? There is nobody now to care for flowers, for I am only a professor, and if I can't teach anybody the right names for flowers, of what use are

flowers to me?" This thought oppressed the poor man so much that he entirely collapsed, and as he was rather wizened to begin with, he was soon reduced to a few stiff tendons and bones, like the ribs of a dry leaf; and even these shreds soon crumbled, and he evaporated altogether. Only his black gown remained to delight the rag-picker. But the goddess in guise of that old woman went on pruning the garden, and it seemed to make no difference in her habits that the child and the botanist were dead.

I think we may surmise that the true name of this goddess must have been Dikè, the same that the wise Democritus was calling Punishment; and the botanist's name must have been Nomos, whom he was calling Agreement; and of course the child Autologos was that innocent illusion which was the theme of his whole discourse.

Aristippus. If this be the nature of madness, I propose that we immediately raise an altar to that deity, and worship him hereafter as the only beneficent god; and in order to avoid the protests of the vulgar, who think madness an evil, we will disguise our deity under the name of Autologos, borrowed from the Stranger's tale; and we will not identify him with the Furies or Harpies, but with Pan, Apollo, Orpheus, and Dionysus.

Dionysius. Agreed: and since my name is derived from that of Dionysus, who must have been my ancestor, I proclaim myself high priest of the new temple.

Democritus. You pay my speech a great tribute.

I have celebrated the mad god so fitly that I have filled his votaries with a new frenzy of worship.

Alcibiades. Aristippus and Dionysius are enemies of science, and you, Democritus, are a believer in it. Being no judge in the matter, I will not pronounce between you, but I can conceive that a man who has spent his whole long life distilling herbs and grinding stones into powder should believe that he knows something of their substance. Nevertheless, intense study, too, is hypnotic, and might not the lucid theory of nature which you think partly awakens you out of the dream of life, be but a dream within a dream and the deepest of your illusions? My whole career seems a myth to me now in memory; yet when I interpret it in terms of your philosophy and imagine instead nothing but clouds of atoms drifting through a black sky, I seem to be descending into an even deeper cavern of reverie. Suppose I was dreaming of a chariot-race, hearing the shouting crowds, blushing to be myself the victor, and reining in my quivering steeds to receive the crown, and suppose that suddenly my dream was transformed, and Olympia and the sunshine and myself and my horses and my joy and the praises of the Athenians turned to atoms fatally combined—I am afraid that, like the child in the Stranger's tale, I should burst into tears at that change of dreams.

Democritus. Do you think I should blame you? Is the sublimity of truth impatient of error? I know well the shock that comes to

innocence on discovering that the beautiful is unsubstantial. The soul, too, has her virginity and must bleed a little before bearing fruit. You misconceive my philosophy if you suppose that I deny the beautiful or would madly forbid it to appear. Has not my whole discourse been an apology for illusion and a proof of its necessity? When I discover that the substance of the beautiful is a certain rhythm and harmony in motion, as the atoms dance in circles through the void (and what else should the substance of the beautiful be if it has a substance at all?) far from destroying the beautiful in the realm of appearance my discovery raises its presence there to a double dignity; for its witchery, being a magic birth, is witchery indeed; and in it its parent nature, whose joy it is, proves her fertility. I deny nothing. Your Olympian victory and your trembling steeds, spattered with foam, and your strong lithe hand detaining them before the altar of Apollo, while you receive the crown—how should science delete these verses from the book of experience or prove that they were never sung? But where is their music now? What was it when passing? A waking dream. Yes, and grief also is a dream, which if it leaves a trace leaves not one of its own quality, but a transmuted and serene image of sorrow in this realm of memory and truth. As the grief of Priam in Homer and the grief of Achilles, springing from the dreadful madness of love and pride in their two bosoms, united in the divine ecstasy of the poet, so all the joys and griefs

of illusion unite and become a strange ecstasy in a sane mind. What would you ask of philosophy? To feed you on sweets and lull you in your errors in the hope that death may overtake you before you understand anything? Ah, wisdom is sharper than death and only the brave can love her. When in the thick of passion the veil suddenly falls, it leaves us bereft of all we thought ours, smitten and consecrated to an unearthly revelation, walking dead among the living, not knowing what we seem to know, not loving what we seem to love, but already translated into an invisible paradise where none of these things are, but one only companion, smiling and silent, who by day and night stands beside us and shakes his head gently, bidding us say Nay, nay, to all our madness. Did you think, because I would not spare you, that I never felt the cold steel? Has not my own heart been pierced? Shed your tears, my son, shed your tears. The young man who has not wept is a savage, and the old man who will not laugh is a fool.

IV

AUTOLOGOS

Alcibiades. Receive us with honour, noble Democritus, for we are heralds of a god. The divine Autologos, patron of madness, now has his temple in our midst, and is about to deliver oracles ; but we are in doubt whether to invoke him as the god of all madness or of sublime madness only ; and since your wisdom first disclosed to us (perhaps against your intention) that the god of madness is the most human of deities and the only one truly beneficent, we come to inquire of you with what rites we should approach him, and what words duly pronounced will render him propitious.

Democritus. If you have your god, inquire of him, and let him prescribe his own mummeries. For the cult of health I might give you some precepts, but who can foretell the whims of delirium ?

Dionysius. Ah, you have not divined the simple profundity of our new religion. We have a shrine, small, rustic, and mysterious ; it is but a great urn which we have erected upside down in a rocky grotto, over a huge cleft stone ; and through this cleft each of us in turn will creep

and, crouching within the hollow vessel like a child in the womb, will whisper to himself his own oracles. For the great Autologos is no mannikin of wood or stone, the object of a degraded idolatry ; he is the speaking Spirit in all of us, whenever it speaks ; and the reverberating urn will give back our words with an impressive echo and an increment of meaning, which will be the divine revelation of ourselves to our own thoughts.

Democritus. Excellent. You come to ask me what words to utter in your automatic capacity, so that when they are sublimated by the rumble of a concave stone, you may revere them as your own inspiration !

Aristippus. Being without prejudice, we enlarge our pleasures in every quarter and from any source ; and if your words should please us we will gladly repeat them, as we do the verses of Homer, without taking the useless trouble of composing others that might not flow so harmoniously or ring so true.

Alcibiades. Yes, venerable Sage, we beg you to compose the liturgy of our god Autologos.

Democritus. The task is new for a philosopher. In my time I have been asked to devise laws for the state, and precepts for shipbuilding, mining, and weaving, and many a new instrument have I contrived in these and in other crafts ; and I have mixed herbs for purging many diseases, and established a holy regimen for the cure of rage : but now I am bidden to institute a cult of madness and babble some litany fit for a foolish god. So

be it: there is leisure for everything in eternity. But I warn you that my invocations may be so potent that the god himself may be transformed and spirited away; so that when you crawl down from your mystic tripod you may find yourselves sane.

Dionysius. Sweet madness will not be driven from me by any incantation.

Aristippus. If health be as pleasant as disease I will allow you to heal me.

Alcibiades. We sometimes beseech a god to spare us, sometimes to descend and fill us with his spirit; and since there seems to be a cruel and a kindly madness, your rites should ward off the one and attract the other.

Democritus. Truly there is a madness that men dread and another that they love, for to dance, laugh, love, and sing is a happy madness, but to sit mumbling and whining with one's face to the wall, or to rage with a drawn sword calling oneself Medea is, according to human opinion, a dreadful fate. Since I am employed for the moment in honouring your god, I will feign to bow to this convention: as when I framed laws or administered medicine I allowed myself to serve a human prejudice, although my heart knew well that according to nature health was not better than disease, nor a city than a desert. Your first invocation of Autologos must accordingly be an acceptance of his gift, which is illusion. But if your worship is to be pleasing to him and ultimately healthful to yourselves you must not grudge

him, as common votaries do, his kingly freedom in bestowing his favours ; you must not prescribe the particular madness which he shall infuse into you. If you are oppressed like Orestes by some fancied guilt, or by some irrational love or inveterate sorrow, prepare your hearts to renounce it and to put it away, not of course in exchange for sanity and knowledge of the truth—these are not gifts for Autologos to give—but in exchange for a different madness : make ready to welcome the inspiration of the god if he should suddenly turn your remorse to complacency, your love to sneers, your sorrow to the hunter's joy. This deity is the impartial patron of every error, and those who devoutly approach his shrine must be eager to cultivate them all in turn, and to be mad daily in some new and wonderful manner. Such a surrender of any pet folly, such an openness to folly of every kind, is essential to the neophyte : let it be the first and preliminary purification of your souls in approaching these mysteries. For lack of such initiation much anguish has been prolonged in the world without necessity. The jesters and the dull-witted, the dwarfs and the giants, the deaf-mutes and the blind have all insulted one another, and felt uneasy and guilty in their own hearts. What a blessing if they had known that they were all equally the children of Autologos, and not one of them saner or more perfect than the other ! If the dwarfs or the deaf-mutes were left to breed by themselves, far from impertinent censors, they would think they had a

civil quota of wit and virtue, such as we thought we had in Athens or in Abdera ; and they would be as proud of their divine beauty as are chattering monkeys or blind moles or any other sort of creature capable of forming habits and expectations. All living souls welcome whatsoever they are ready to cope with ; all else they ignore, or pronounce to be monstrous and wrong, or deny to be possible. So the mother of the first tailless child—for men formerly had tails—wept bitterly and consulted the soothsayers, elders conspicuous for their long and honourable tails, who gave out oracles from the hollow of ancient trees ; and she asked what unwitting impiety she or her husband could have committed, that the just gods should condemn their innocent child to such eternal disgrace. When, however, other tailless births began to occur, at first the legislators had the little monsters put rigorously to death ; but soon, as the parents began to offer resistance, they suffered a scapegoat to be sacrificed instead ; and persons without a tail were merely condemned to pass their lives in slavery, or at least without the rights of citizenship ; because the philosophers, who all belonged to the elder generation with ample tails, declared that without a tail no man was really human or could be admitted after death into the company of the gods. Yet later, when that hinder ornament had become rare, opinion was reversed, until the priests, legislators, and sages gathered in council and decreed, by a majority vote, that a tail in man was unnatural, and that the tradition

that such things had existed was an invention of ignorant poets, and absurd. When, however, by a casual reversion, and sport of nature, a child with a tail was born here and there, not only was the infant instantly despatched, but the mother was burned alive for having had commerce with a devil.

Thus among those who know not Autologos the greatest odium attaches to being as the vulgar are not, or to lacking some usual organ or instinct, however useless ; and the exceptions are reduced to lead a pitiable existence, not so much by any actual defect in their constitution as by the contempt and cruelty of the majority, always a tribe of intolerant coxcombs.

Nor will it suffice, in the pure and acceptable worship of Autologos, to dismiss all passionate and exclusive attachment to any one form of madness ; you should not suffer the remnants of one dream to survive and confuse the next, but allow deep sleep to intervene between vision and vision. Though three tragedies and one comedy be played in one day in the same theatre, the stage is thoroughly cleared in the intervals, and the masks and straggling chorus of one are not allowed to disfigure the other, disturbing its harmony and dishonouring their own function ; for the elements of illusion become ghastly when the rush and glamour of action no longer vivifies them. Cleanse the cup perfectly, therefore, before each libation, that every draught may be pure, the illusion unqualified, and the peace after it profound.

Remember also that you are votaries of madness and not mad unwittingly. It was a disgrace to the barbarians, and sometimes to the Bacchic orgies which Phrygia had lent us, that diseased and unseemly madmen mingled there with those who were mad only devotionally and in the spirit of the festival. The actor must not fall from the stage or rant out of metre ; he must not linger beyond his time or lengthen his speeches. The very plasticity of his art, which makes him ready to be now a man, now a woman, now a clown, and now a prophet, requires a substance in its Protean changes, so that each part may be learned and recited faithfully, in due order and on the right occasions. The divers inspirations of the god would not be received worthily unless the soul was stable in her docility and invincibly herself, even as the winds would raise no storm and never manifest their vehemence if the water of the sea which they drive violently heavenward had not its inalienable weight and did not fall back with an equal violence, perpetually returning to its ancient level. Remember, accordingly, in all your slashing madness that this is madness which you enact : bend to the inspiration of the god, and wait for it to pass. The void is no less real than the atoms, and larger : it does not resist them, and while by their sport they diversify it, it does not change. So let your ship have an anchor laid deep in nothingness : on that anchor you may ride any storm without too much anxiety. In your loves be devoted, not agonized

or frenzied. The consciousness of vanity is a great disinfectant: it fills religion, as it fills life, with fortitude, dignity, and kindness.

Let the liturgy of Autologos therefore be as follows, and whenever you enter your sacred urn, chant to yourselves these words:

Work, O work within me, divine Autologos, the miracle of madness, that what exists not in nature may arise in thought.

From the abyss of nothingness draw what dream thou wilt.

May it be a pure dream, perfect and entire. Why should one nothing devour another nothing in fear and hate?

Suffer each day's sun to set in peace: slowly, after the pause of night, another will rise to lighten the morrow.

As all suns pass before the face of darkness, and hide it awhile with their splendour, so on many-coloured wings thought flies through the silence, but the silence endures.

Blessed be thy coming, Autologos, and more blessed thy going.

Dionysius. Our best thanks, excellent hierophant. The archaic flavour of our liturgy and its metaphysical depth are all we could desire; and I believe we may account it veritably an ancient mystery, which after being disused for ages, has been restored by your inspiration; so that we may celebrate at once the antiquity of our ritual and our originality in re-establishing it to-day.

Alcibiades (*after glancing at Aristippus*). We

also thank you, and are charmed more than ever with the new worship we are adopting. Now without delay we will return to the fane and begin to rehearse our festival. (*He places one hand on the shoulder of Aristippus and the other on that of Dionysius, and the three glide away obliquely, first to the right and then to the left, in a measured dance.*)

Democritus. You, silent Stranger, do not follow the others on their festive errand, and have not to-day opened your lips. Perhaps you are offended at our enlightened religion.

The Stranger. Not offended, but helpless and envious, like a boy admiring from afar the feats of an athlete or the gleaming armour of soldiers on the march. It is rash to intrude upon the piety of others : both the depth and the grace of it elude the stranger.

Democritus. Religion is indeed a convention which a man must be bred in to endure with any patience ; and yet religion, for all its poetic motley, comes closer than work-a-day opinion to the heart of things. In invoking the aid of the gods and in attributing all things to their providence and power, each of us shatters his greatest illusion and heals his most radical madness. What madness, you will ask, and what illusion ? This : that his thoughts produce one another or produce his actions : the very illusion of Autologos. These young fops, dancing away to their mock mysteries, are ingenious sophists and pleasant companions, but they are utterly without religion ;

and if your heart held you back as if from sacrilege from following in their train, it did not deceive you. Autologos is the one perfect atheist: he is persuaded that he rules and creates himself. What madness! And yet how irresistible is the voice of sensation, and will, and thought, at every moment of animate existence! The open-mouthed rabble shouting in the agora suppose that nothing controls them but their pert feelings and imaginations, by miracle unanimous; and even the demagogue who is pulling the strings of their ignorance and cupidity fancies that he is freely ruling the world, and forgets the cupidity and ignorance in his own soul which have put those empty catch-words into his bawling mouth. Miserable puppets! the most visionary of mystics is wise in comparison. He knows how invisibly fly the shafts of Apollo: let but the lightest of them cut the knot of the heart, and suddenly there is an end of eloquence and policy and mighty determination. He knows that it suffices for the wind to change and all the fleets of thought will forget their errand and sail for another haven. Religion in its humility restores man to his only dignity, the courage to live by grace. Admonished by religion, he gives thanks, acknowledging his utter dependence on the unseen, in the past and in the present; and he prays, acknowledging his utter dependence on the unseen for the future. He sees that the issue of nothing is in his hands, seeing that he knows not whether at the next moment he will still be alive; nor what ambushed

powers will traverse his path, or subtly undo the strength and the loves in his own bosom. But looking up at the broad heaven, at returning day and the revolving year, he humbly trusts the mute promises of the gods, and because of the favour they may have shown him, he may trust even himself. For what is the truth of the matter? That the atoms in their fatal courses bring all things about by necessity, and that men's thoughts and efforts and tears are but signs and omens of the march of fate, prophetic here, and there deceptive, but always vain and impotent in themselves, never therefore wise save in confessing their own weakness, and in little things as in great, in their own motions as in those of heaven, saluting and honouring the gods.

The Stranger. But can the atoms be called gods?

Democritus. As the sun is called Phoebus and the sea Poseidon, and the heart's warmth Love, and as this bundle of atoms is called Democritus. The name is a name, and the image imaginary, yet the truth of it is true.

The Stranger. But in this bundle of atoms called Democritus Autologos just now was speaking, and thought in you was alive; and the poets feign Autologos to be speaking also in the sun and in the sea. Does living illusion then haunt all the atoms in their flight, and is the whole universe the body of Autologos?

Democritus. Fancy can conceive only a kindred fancy, such as might spring from organs similar

to its own ; but if life is lavish in illusion here, why not also there ? A prudent man will not blaspheme against any god.

The Stranger. Then Autologos is truly a great, a boundless, an irrepressible spirit ?

Democritus. He is indeed, else even in jest I should not have sung his praises.

V

LOVERS OF ILLUSION

Democritus. What means this rout? Why this rush and clamour in eternity? Have you been celebrating the rites of your new god of madness, that you come breathless, dragging the unhappy Stranger as if he were a prisoner of war? And why these ridiculous crowns of thistle and burrs, as if you had turned a funeral into an orgy?

Alcibiades. We should have preferred laurel and roses, but we took what we found.

Dionysius. We had long since taken counsel, venerable Sage, how to destroy your philosophy. We come to refute, as we utterly disown, your preference for truth over illusion. We have restrained ourselves with difficulty until to-day; but we know that you, now being immortal, cannot change your mind even if thrice refuted; and we had decided to wait until the Stranger should reappear, for the wretch is your disciple, and a witness to our former disputes; but being alive, he can be compelled to recant, and we are determined that his conversion shall mark your defeat and our triumph. Therefore we no sooner spied the rash mortal than we seized him as a

hostage, and we mean to hold him down until he has made amends for you both ; and the sooner he forswears your errors, the sooner he shall be suffered to depart.

Democritus. If you use force, you will not seem confident of exercising persuasion, and will never know whether you have done so. Leave the poor Stranger in peace ; he is pestered enough, I fancy, in his own world. And let me at once hear your refutation, and if your tumult subsides you may be able to hear my answer, even if not to understand it.

Alcibiades. Tremble, discredited Sage ; we bring against you not one refutation but three, because while united in attacking you, we have by no means agreed to defend one another. Nor will our three spears pierce the same point in your shield ; for my shaft will transfix your allegation that reason is a form of madness, whereas Dionysius will destroy your assertion that science is better than illusion, and Aristippus will abolish the difference which you have made between them in respect to truth and will prove that at most they differ only in duration and pleasantness.

Democritus. At least you are pleasant assailants, who exhibit your wooden weapons before the fight, so that my panoplied philosophy need not fear the slightest wound. Come on, then, young braggarts, and let me endure your first assault.

Dionysius. I deliver it, and under good auspices: for I come as priest of Autologos, our new divinity,

to whom in scorn of ancient superstition, we have vowed perpetual worship ; and I speak also in the name of the divine Plato, master of mystics, initiates, and madmen, and of all who in derision of cold reports, science, or calculation, behold the absolute truth face to face in an inward vision. Madness, I declare in my name and in theirs, is a divine gift. Prophets, poets, and priests, who are notoriously mad, are nevertheless held in the highest esteem by all well-ordered nations ; and any rebellion against their dogmas in the name of reason is well known to be ill-bred, pert, superficial, and destructive of morality and of the state. A touch of madness, even in the dullest of us, is a saving grace, and it is well that in feasts, mysteries, and tragedies we should enact the various cries and obsessions of madmen as vividly as possible, and as religiously, in order to relax a little the punctilious sanity, or rather the weary and mean artificialities, which the vulgar world imposes upon us. Far above your science, O wise and mad Democritus, I prize the mystic vision of those souls who, inverting the cup of reason, pour their spirits out in a rapturous libation to my ancestor Dionysus, and go to rejoin the deep soul of the earth. You possess, no doubt, much curious knowledge of herbs, and atoms, and the disgusting inner organs of the body—knowledge of no importance to monarchs or to liberal minds ; but in the higher things of the spirit you are not versed. The value of madness is not such as you attribute to the normal

illusions of sense or opinion, which Punishment and Agreement bring into a blind and external harmony with nature. On the contrary, such madness is almost sane, and quite uninspired; but divine madness wafts the soul away altogether from the sad circumstances of earth, and bids it live like a young god only among its own chosen creations. Had we not licence to be mad, we should not be our own masters, but the ignoble product of other things; and to be mad is simply, in spite of gods and men, to be indomitably free.

In one respect, Democritus, I admit that you separate yourself from the vulgar and denounce their prejudice, for you deny that illusion is an evil in itself since nothing, according to you, is good or evil in the eye of nature. But you soon seem to forget your own precept, and talk as if to discover things actual and material, which you say are clouds of dust whirling in the air, were better than to dwell on things dreamt and invented: an opinion that I should have expected to hear only from some man of no cultivation. Of course, I am not deceived by your gruff airs, and pretended scorn of human illusions: when was there a human illusion more admirably unsubstantial than your philosophy? In the art with which you sustain your fancy at that precarious height, I recognize your scientific genius. Your condemnation of other species of madness is but a part of your playful imposture, and far from offending me, makes me your friend; because illusion would lose half its charm if there

were not variety in it. So in you, Aristippus, I prize the affectation of simplicity. The genuine simplicity of the boor would be insufferably tedious ; but in you it is the pose of a subtle wit, and exquisite in its unreality. No less charming was the express rusticity of my Sicilian Theocritus, the artifice of an accomplished man, to whom the rough comedy of country manners is a remote memory or satirical jest; although I do not say that here and there his own tears or enchantments may not have pulsed in these rustic measures. Fancy is not a falsification of nature, because nothing in nature is worth noting, or even possible to note, save for the fancy which overlays it. I have known many a masquerade in my time, royal splendour, love, friendship, philosophy, treachery, and exile ; but in all I have loved only the image, so that here, where images are all, I enjoy my life again more truly than when I was distractedly undergoing it in that other unmannerly world. Each phase of experience has left me a theme for reflection, each tiresome farce some song pleasant to remember. Had I had, among my royal and other cares, leisure for the poet's art, I might have composed an epic out of my life while I was still living it, and entirely eclipsed Homer and his *Odyssey*. For I should have described not material monsters or obvious charmers, like Calypso and Nausicaa, but the subtle mixture of light and shadow, of force and impotence in my own soul. I should have set forth the first virgin glow and all the false after-

fustian of patriotism, of prophecy, and of science. I should have shown that there is nothing worth having in kingship but what a penniless dreamer may enjoy in conceiving it, and that the illusion in love, in wisdom, and in enthusiasm is the true and only virtue in them. To have a clean and scentless intellect, my noble Democritus, that should merely report things as they are, would be almost like not existing; so clear and transparent a medium would hardly be a soul. Happily mine was like a grain of incense that, thrown by some deity into the embers of a mortal body, rose in a voluminous and sweet-smelling cloud: and the god that let my spirit fall from heaven unawares, as he scattered the seeds of a myriad other lives, now breathes it in again with voluptuous surprise; for he perceives that it was a part of his own substance, having the divine gift of creation.

You observe that my onslaught, O Sage of Abdera, has not been malicious. In showing the falseness of your doctrine I have not denied its magnificence: on the contrary, its very falseness makes all its charm in my eyes, and I have no murderous intent in my refutation. Only a child drives a sword through a painted monster. I have ever loved philosophers, overlooking and pardoning the foolish doctrines which they chose to profess, since necessity and custom compelled them to profess something. All philosophers, if they were eloquent and original, were equally welcome at my court; and now that I have

become in turn a courtier of Pluto, I rejoice that he has added you, with your mocking wisdom, to the famous circle of my intimates.

Democritus (*who has drawn his cloak over his head*). Tell me, Alcibiades, has Dionysius finished his bawdy speech ?

Alcibiades. So it seems. Why do you cover your face ?

Democritus. The incense of this sacrifice may be sweet to your god Autologos, but it sticks in my throat.

Alcibiades. I am sure he has finished. He is adjusting his mantle.

Democritus. Then I may lift my head. Glorious monarch happily dethroned, I have listened to your words with averted face, for fear of being blinded by their splendour ; my thin unpoetical soul could not have interposed a veil thick enough to obscure them. I am well aware that the truth is not pleasant to everybody. Children are natural mythologists : they beg to be told tales, and love not only to invent but to enact falsehoods. Young and old agree in finding it irksome to see things as they are ; even in husbandry and brutal war (in which facts have to be faced) they play and lie to themselves as much as they dare ; and they turn from their work at the first opportunity to pursue their true good in gaming, drinking, kissing, singing, witnessing endless tragedies and comedies, and shouting for revolution in the public assembly ; for they are men of imagination. So were you ; and I should be far from hinting

that you ought to have been otherwise, if I did not remember that you were a monarch. Your philosophy would be perfect, if instead of being a king you had been a cabbage. The cabbage cannot move ; it therefore matters nothing if its soul ignores the motions and positions of outer things, or fails to distinguish them according to their natures ; it is enough that, fostered by ambient influences which it cannot modify, its soul should circulate inwardly and flower as it will. But a cabbage cannot give direction to others ; it makes a poor king. So, Dionysius, did you, for circumstances escaped you. Ah, if you had only been born a cabbage, how entirely your attention might have been devoted to that more than Homeric epic about yourself ! There is no difficulty in dreaming ; the heart of nature is full of dreams ; and I daresay there is a poet in every nut and in every berry. But the soul of animals must be watchful ; they cannot live on mere hope, fortitude, and endurance ; they must hasten to meet perils and opportunities, and dreams are fatal to them when, action being necessary, true perception is indispensable. Thus a creature endowed with locomotion lies under a mighty compulsion to discover the truth. Hence I and the Stranger, who have both been observant travellers, have discovered so much more of it than you. When a flea, enticed from a distance by the wafted warmth and fragrance of your body, jumps from a beggar's rags and lodges snugly in some fold of your royal flesh, it is a wise flea,

not only according to Socrates and Aristippus, in that it prefers the better to the worse, but also according to me, in that it has a keen scent and true knowledge of nature. But when presently sated and swollen with your rich blood, this same flea begins to have poetic visions, such as your philosophy approves, and dreams he is a god in a red heaven, then from this ecstatic flea wisdom jumps back to you ; for you awake at the prick of its snout from your epic slumber and begin searching for that flea with all a poor man's sagacity, until you catch it, torpid as it has become, and crush it between your two thumb-nails. If you envy that sated flea or that poetic cabbage, their fate will not be denied you ; but I, being in the alert state of a waking animal, prefer knowing and jumping.

Dionysius. Democritus is pleased to rail, like the Cynics of old in my palace, to whom I never denied an alms for having perhaps abused me ; and he reminds me of what I always said in those days, that you philosophers agree in nothing except in taking yourselves too seriously. The graceful Plato, at his best, is an exception ; and therefore I follow him.

Alcibiades. Let us admit that pleasure in illusion is perilous and brief. But is not mortal life in any case brief and perilous, especially when it is boldly lived ? Here in eternity all durations of existence become equal, but all its qualities remain unlike. Now we see clearly that true happiness is once to have touched perfection, and not to have jogged on for ever in mediocrity.

Aristippus. Courage, Alcibiades. If Democritus attacks you for that noble sally, rely on me.

Dionysius. I too will sustain you.

Alcibiades. Like a hero in Homer I defy you with taunts, O anatomist of nature. I am invincible. A dethroned monarch and a reprobate moralist support me on either hand.

Aristippus. Why reprobate? Because I measure goods by their goodness and not by their origin? What, I pray, lends dignity to one source of pleasure rather than to another, save that pleasure flows from it more pure and abundant? If a drug can stir up my brain or my kidney, and out of particles caught up from those worthy substances can create lovely forms and curious motions which I trace in a dream, why is that worse than if nature had caught up atoms from the slime of the earth or from the air and outside my body had composed flowers or animals that I could gaze upon and love? Both beauties are delightful and both are transitory, and to have pleasure in both, while they last, is the part of wisdom.

Democritus. Wisdom, if you had it, would enable you to discern what lies in your fancy from what lies in the outer world.

Aristippus. Vain discernment, since the better and the worse are not concerned in it. You profess, I know, to ignore moral distinctions and to describe reality without fondness or displeasure; but in fact you are full of scorn for the dreamer, even if he is willing to admit frankly that he merely

dreams. You are secretly convinced that to perceive facts is a blessed privilege, and to create imaginary beauties a disgraceful self-delusion. You would, I think, express your moral judgements better if you acknowledged them to be vapours of your private soul, and not implications of your alleged science. It is perfectly indifferent to me whether what gives me pleasure is a solid body or an airy illusion. Whichever object is the more delightful seems to me the better, and I no more care whether it exists within or without my skull, than I ask whether the zephyr that refreshes me blows from the east or the west.

Alcibiades. Sailors and augurs, Aristippus, are alive only to that: their skin is hardy and their eye sharp, and they are not without joy in their keen perceptions. There's no fancy like a fact.

Aristippus. I admit that material objects usually produce a more violent pleasure than imaginary ones; whereas, on the contrary, the worst plagues and torments are fantastic, turning as they do on fear, shame, and love, all three of which are unnecessary. Why let present pleasure be spoilt by such spectres of fancy? Your poet is by nature a melancholy booby and a ridiculous weakling; whereas your jolly huntsman and wine-bibber, your lusty rogue, and your laughing homely philosopher are brave and cheery souls. On that ground I might share the preference of Democritus for external perception and, as he calls it, an elastic intellect; but I prize the rough breezes of nature only because they blow health and

pleasure upon me ; while he seems somehow to think that not to be deceived is an absolute good.

Dionysius. Democritus is too wise to take up such a position. He does not assert that illusion is an evil—for nothing, according to him, is evil in nature—but only that illusion is not true knowledge : and so much should be granted him on all hands. Whether true knowledge is beautiful or whether illusion is beautiful remains in any case a matter of opinion ; and if our loves differ, every man is free to lead his own bride home.

Alcibiades. As for me, if ever I was wedded to Illusion, I hereby repudiate and divorce her ; and though people may call me a traitor, I renounce all alliance with Aristippus and Dionysius and pass over to the camp of the valiant Democritus. Illusion may be truly pleasing while we think it true ; but to cling to it knowing it to be illusion is ignominious and wellnigh impossible. A dream exists by playing upon some disposition of the soul which would have been better satisfied in action, because, as Democritus says, man is an animal addressed to action and adventure ; he will never be content to cheat his instincts with images unless he is a cripple or a coward. If you prefer illusions to realities, it is only because all decent realities have eluded you and left you in the lurch ; or else your contempt for the world is mere hypocrisy and funk, as when a boy says that swimming is unworthy of a man and fit only for fishes, because he is afraid of the cold water. Not that there is anything effeminate in fine fancies

when they come honestly. I like a youngster who falls in love or who makes verses because he can't help it—the thing has happened to me more than once—but if he cultivates and fondles his emotions on purpose, he is a coxcomb. You two disreputable sluggards have never willingly moved except from the bed-chamber to the baths and from the baths to the banquet-hall, and to relieve the tedium and stuffiness of your existence you have summoned the poets or your own sickly philosophy to flatter you in your sloth. But imagination, even that of Homer, is pale and sterile compared with the lightnings of fortune. How should it be otherwise when fancy is itself but a cryptic part of nature? It flickers in the dark, like a lamp in the inmost chamber of an Egyptian temple; whereas under the sun stretch all the zones and all the nations, filled with an undreamt-of variety of goods and evils, beauties and absurdities. All these an intrepid philosopher might scour and pillage, if he did not shut himself up, as most philosophers do, within the walls of his native city, to a petty legal life and trite disputations. My own life, I allow, was but ill-conducted; it passed among storms and ended in shipwreck; yet I account it better than dreaming or beating time to the syllables of some verse. I would rather be the soldier I was, even with my mottled fortunes, than imagine myself a metaphysical hero, like Dionysius in the epic which he never composed. The fruit of my experience is that I despise rhetoricians and demagogues and

moralizers and comedians, and respect rather the rough arts and passions of mariners and soldiers, the patience of ploughmen, and the shrewdness of merchants or of the masters in any craft; all people acquainted with danger and hardship and knowing something well, though it be a small matter, and each striking out bravely, like an honest blind creature, to have his will in the world.

Aristippus. I congratulate Democritus on this accession to his strength. Alcibiades is a moralist who cannot divide good from evil.

Democritus. That is a division which all men are constrained to make, whether they be called moralists or not. All nature falls for every living creature into two strands, the friendly and the hostile, the beloved and the detested. There is not a young glutton or an old woman but has a moral philosophy, Aristippus, as genuine as yours. The question is only by how noble a nature the division is made, and with how much knowledge of the world; and all your effrontery will not persuade you, or any one else, that you know the world better than Alcibiades, or have a nobler nature.

Aristippus. He is taller and I am fatter: but I have yet to learn that on that account he is the better man. His length came to him without his doing; my breadth is the fruit of wisdom.

Democritus. Now that by this conspicuous defection your cohort is dispersed and your attack upon me turned to derision, it remains only to discover whether you have persuaded the Stranger;

and as numbers are now equal in our two camps, the intimidation which you would have practised upon him is also rendered abortive. He may speak his mind without fear of ill-usage.

The Stranger. Nothing I have heard to-day has shaken in the least my old allegiance and much has confirmed it. Nevertheless, I am not without a certain sympathy with Dionysius and Aristippus when they extoll the pleasures of the simple mind and cling passionately to immediate experience. After all I am a child of my time; our very anarchy has driven us to a kind of profundity, by convincing us that the farther we travel from appearance the more we expose ourselves to illusion. Your hypothesis, Democritus, may be absolutely right; but what assurance can you have of its truth? Your scientific imagination draws a picture of minute geometrical solids swimming in space: this picture did not exist until your genius composed it; it is a thing of yesterday and Abdera gave it birth, utterly remote, then, in time and existence from the atoms, the motion, and the void which may have formed the substance of nature from all eternity. As the words substance and atoms are audible signs by which our groping discourse names and designates that ancient reality, so your bright images of cubes, pyramids, and spheres, and your dark image of an infinite void, are graphic signs for that same reality. Doubtless they are the best symbols for it calligraphically—for what can be cleaner than the clean or clearer than the clear?—and also, as

experience has shown, the best in calculation and practice ; but still in their visionary aspect signs only and symbols, products of the human eye and imagination. If all this be admitted as obvious and as corresponding with your constant intention in your doctrine of atoms, I accept the latter ; and all the mathematical veils which my contemporaries have spun between crude appearances and the notion of atoms only remove its application to a deeper level of nature ; for somehow the place where a thing is to be found must in the end differ substantially from the surrounding places. But if you meant that by a sort of revelation the eternal atoms and void and motions, exactly as they are, have appeared in your mind's eye, and that there never was and never can be anything in nature save what your scientific imagination at this moment conceives, then I should agree with Dionysius that you are making idols of your ideas and forgetting that reason, as you yourself maintain, is a form of madness, checked only by Punishment and Agreement. Never was a theory of nature more chastened than yours or more harmonious with the practice of the arts ; but can any thought kindled in a human brain burn with a light so infinitely powerful and pure as to reveal the whole universe in its uttermost reaches and exact constitution ?

Dionysius. Stranger, we thank you : not that what you urge is particularly intelligible to us or of ultimate consequence ; yet it serves to remind our headstrong system-builders of their humanity

and to show them how much wiser they would be if they remembered that they are mad.

Democritus. You thank the Stranger for an ill service, when he repeats the sophistry of his contemporaries who, wallowing in sensation and having little understanding, think that understanding is a form of sense, and science but an exchange of images. Such is the pleasant fallacy of idlers to whom the plough is only the picture of a plough, because they never have followed it. When my dog smells a rat and busily digs up the ground to dislodge the beast from its hiding, what images, think you, do the dog's senses, for all their keenness, supply to his mind? A faint scent only. Yet on occasion of that scent, understanding in the dog leads him to dig and watch, because a living rat is there of which he has a great lust but no imagination. So Leucippus and I, being keen hounds, have been warned by smell, sight, touch, and all the senses that there is a substance at hand; lying in wait for it, we have traced its motions and divided its parts, following and measuring and counting all the transformations of bodies; and the atoms we have unearthed are not images to the eye or syllables sounding in the ear, but bits of the substance for which we hungered; and by our patient digging we have caught the rat. Certainly our true knowledge, since we were dreaming mortals, was still conveyed or accompanied by words and images, even as the dog in devouring the rat might receive new and confused sensations: but these our under-

standing traversed and overlooked, and far from imposing the likeness of any image on substance, disowned all images and saluted the substance in its natural seat and effective motion. No man has seen the atoms ; nor do the forms which, for excellent reasons, we believe them to possess ever appear in any dream to the eye or to the fancy. How are the Egyptians assured that their Pyramids are pyramids ? Is it by scent or by touch, or by sight which can never present anything of a pyramid but some vague triangle or rhomboid or square ? No ; that assurance comes to them by cutting and counting and measuring the stones, and by much pacing and exploration ; above all it comes to them by building, for art and science are a single gift, called science inasmuch as art refashions the mind, and called art inasmuch as by science the world is refashioned. No doubt the art of the Egyptians was madness to heap up so many stones to no purpose ; and it was madness in me and in Leucippus to sweat after vain knowledge ; yet that art of theirs was true art, as their monuments attest by still standing, and our knowledge is true knowledge, and nature for ever will give it proof.

As for you, you are all lovers of illusion and banded against me in your hearts. Dionysius and Aristippus are like children in arms, most royal in their impotence, demanding that substance shall bear them aloft always prosperously by no contrivance of theirs, while they live cooing and crooning between sleep and wake. Alcibiades

is a little man in comparison, and can run about on his own legs, but only to chase the bubbles of adventure and peril, and command for the sake of commanding; and this folly let loose puts him in marvellous conceit of his own prowess. As for the Stranger, having a paler soul, if he salutes the atoms from a distance, it is only in condescension to the exigences of art or calculation, which he knows are not obedient to magic; but he honours reality only for illusion's sake, and studies in nature only pageants and perspectives, and the frail enchantments which are the food of love. I bid you immediately liberate him on your own terms, as having recanted and disowned my philosophy, which will not tolerate that substance, the master, should be received only that it may minister to appearance, the slave. I therefore stand alone and am content to do so. The universe is my sufficient companion. Who was ever more faithful than that silent friend? I will dismiss and expel every remnant of illusion even in myself, in order that nothing of me may remain save the atoms that compose me, and to them I will transfer all my fond being, placing my treasure where my substance has ever been; so that dwelling wholly there, when you who are all vanity have perished and the part of me which is vain has also dissolved, my glad strength shall be the force that destroys me, and while the atoms are I shall be.

VI

ON SELF-GOVERNMENT

First Dialogue

Socrates. Whom do I see approaching with downcast looks? My friend the Stranger? Have you come to-day to remain with us for good, or is this but another brief excursion into the realm of sanity, from which you hope to return presently to your crazy world?

The Stranger. I can hardly hope, Socrates, to dwell in your distinguished company after I am dead. Therefore I take every opportunity to visit you now while I may.

Socrates. 'Tis at rare intervals. Probably you think you are better employed in the sunlight, or can see better in it. My own eyes are more like the owl's than like the eagle's, and I can see farther in this twilight than ever in the glare of the Athenian day. I was always an ignorant man, depending on my disciples for sure first principles and for irrefragable facts, knowledge of which they seemed to possess by nature, although my dullness, or some divine impediment, had prevented me from discovering all those certain truths when I was of their age. That old blind-

ness of mine is now redoubled in respect to the living world; for whereas liberation from the body has opened to me a large prospect towards the past and the future, it has cut off my old channels of dubious communication with material things; and it is only the truth of them before they arise or after they perish that lies spread out before me for direct inspection. In their transit through existence they are eclipsed in these heavens, and I can know them only by report of travellers such as you from the antipodes. My information about your affairs is accordingly most incomplete, and worst of all is brought to me by unphilosophical messengers; for only whimsical and ill-bred spirits now seem to reach this place. I have heard, for instance, of an obscure oracle which you may be able to interpret for me. The god must have delivered it in some barbarous tongue, and perhaps in verse, which has been ill translated: but the monumental inscription which my informant had seen seems to have read as follows:

RIGHT GOVERNMENT
RESTS ON THE WILL
OF THE GOVERNED

The Stranger. We need no god and no oracle to tell us that. It is a commonplace, and the foundation of all our politics.

Socrates. I rejoice to hear it; for if the maxim is always on your lips, you will probably be able to tell me what it means. Does right government, I pray, mean good government? And

does the will of the governed mean their wishes for the moment, or their habitual ruling passion, or their true and ultimate good ?

The Stranger. I am hardly able, Socrates, to answer all these questions at once ; and even if you put them to me singly, I am afraid I should not be ready with glib replies, unless it were half in jest, without expecting that they would bear inspection. Nowadays I place less reliance than ever upon exact words and (although you will rebuke me for it) I feel that there is a current in things that carries all our thoughts away : not only that oracle, as you call it, about right government, but also any wiser maxims that we might substitute for it. In my youth my ears were deafened by a variety of shrill cries, Liberty, Progress, Science, Culture ; but time, and especially this last revolution in our affairs, has taught me how little it mattered what we thought the cries meant, since events in the long run will falsify any policy, and render obsolete any conviction ; and the only significance I can still attach to those watchwords is no definable significance, but only a vague association of each of them with some shift in our manners or politics or industrial arts. But why should I trouble you in your immortal serenity with these squabbles and delusions of living men ? It was not to talk about them that I came into your presence, but rather to escape from them into your surer wisdom.

Socrates. You will not escape them, my friend, unless you learn to understand them. You know

well that my wisdom lies only in asking questions. What you come to take refuge in is not my philosophy, but yours, which you think I may help you to discover and to put into words ; and if this occurs, it will not be wonderful that you should approve the answers to my questions, since it is you who will give them. But to-day you may be disappointed, for there is evidently something new on your conscience, and you may not know your own mind. Formerly, if I inquired of you concerning the affairs of your provisional world, you stinted your answers, and changed the subject ; apparently you hardly followed the events of your own day more closely than we can follow them here by report, as if they were things long past ; and you seemed to feel an indifference (premature on your part) to mortal things, and an early immunity from care. But now the wasp of actuality seems to have stung you, and you bring with you a heavier scent of earth and of new-shed blood. I am not surprised at your distress. Under the blue sky society is like Zeus, who is lord over it ; it expresses its will less by law-giving than by nods and thunderbolts. Strange that in the light of day there should be so much blindness, and here where Pluto in comparative darkness rules over far vaster multitudes there should be never a murmur nor a rumble, but a just estimation of all things, and a place for all. Let us not miss the opportunity, then, while we are together, I to hear your tragedy, and you to ponder its moral.

The Stranger. Our tragedy is an old one, of which you drew the moral long ago; it is the tragedy of those who do as they wish, but do not get what they want. It is the tragedy of self-government.

Socrates. It would be a terrible tragedy indeed if such an excellent thing as self-government came to a bad end. But I cannot credit the report, because a people who had learned self-government would be a race of philosophers, each governing himself and himself only, and inwardly safe from any real misfortune. I rejoice that the republic of the living, contrary to expectation, should have become in my absence so similar to this happy commonwealth of immortals, where no spirit molests any other, or needs another's support.

The Stranger. Irony, Socrates, cannot shame the facts, which have an irony of their own. Of course by self-government we do not mean the government of self. We mean that people collectively issue the orders which they must obey individually.

Socrates. How surprising! Am I to understand that under self-government, as you practise it, no man governs himself in anything, but that each is governed in everything by all the others?

The Stranger. It would come to that, if our system were perfect.

Socrates. Then your democracy, which I suppose intends to express the autonomy of the individual, in effect entirely abolishes that autonomy?

The Stranger. Yes, but without violence. There is an unwritten and plastic law in the modern world which we call fashion; and the more thoroughly we conform to it the freer and the finer we think ourselves. Fashion without magistrates rules by the will of the governed: it is pleasant to go where everybody goes, to think what everybody thinks, and to dance as everybody dances. In fashion I might find an answer to that nestful of questions which you were putting just now: for the will of the governed, by which fashion rules, on the surface is a passing caprice; but this caprice is grafted upon an habitual passion, namely, on a rooted instinct to lead, to follow, or somehow to lose oneself in a common enjoyment of life with one's fellow-men, especially those of one's age and class; and finally this ruling passion leads to the ultimate good, as the followers of fashion conceive it; for they think the ultimate good is life itself, in its pervasive immediacy, made as intense and vigorous as possible by continual novelty and emulation, not for the sake of any prize or result, but just for the running's sake. Thus fashion governs us with our hearty consent, not only in our manners and appointments, but in our religion and science, and above all in our politics. There is nothing that recommends any opinion or custom to us more than to hear that it is the latest thing, that everybody is adopting it, and that it is universal nowadays in the leading circles. Even our philosophers have their ear to the ground, and tell us with

unction how the world is marching. Their conscience would reproach them, and they would wish to hang themselves, if they were not on the winning side. The event, they say, is always the judgement of God.

Socrates. Long ago Heraclitus said so; but the sentence which divine justice passes on each new birth is severe; it is always death.

The Stranger. Yes, but a natural death, followed by some natural resurrection. Why be afraid of revolution?

Socrates. Why indeed, if you mean the revolution of the heavens or of the seasons or the descent of each generation in its turn to the grave? That which I fear—no longer for myself but for you—is that you should not govern yourselves well while you live, and should thereby condemn yourselves here to an eternal bitterness. Are all fashions equally good? Are all transitions equally happy? Are youth and age, in their appointed round, always beautiful and perfect? Have you learned how to live? Do you know how to die? If you neglected these questions your self-government would not be an art, but a blind experiment. Art, which is action guided by knowledge, is the principle of benefit, and without art the freer a man is the more miserable he must become.

The Stranger. Government among us is certainly not an art, but a fatality. In so far as it is not a matter of mere tradition and routine, it results from contrary purposes and parties

pulling against each other in a tug-of-war, for the sake of office or of some immediate reform or relief. Whether the effects of government are beneficent in the end nobody can tell, because nobody can foresee the infinite radiations of those effects in the future; nor even in the present have we any clear or authoritative notion of the uses of government, or any criterion by which to measure the various goods that various people might regard as ultimate, such as health, friendship, knowledge, laughter, or heaven. And so far is government among us from regarding any ultimate good, that many are inclined to look in other directions for true guidance in their allegiances, and for the means to happiness; and they regard politics with aversion, and politicians with contempt, thinking that government, at best, is a nuisance.

Socrates. And is that, pray, your own opinion?

The Stranger. I will not venture to make it mine before you have examined it. I remember the fate of all those innocents who have fallen into your hands and have had to eat their own words.

Socrates. Very well; let me ask you this other question instead: if government is not an art, how can you or your friends ever determine what measures to approve or what magistrates to raise to office?

The Stranger. Nothing easier. We support such as express our ideas or share our desires.

Socrates. And your ideas and desires are formed on what principle?

The Stranger. On none, of course. They come to us gaily, like song to the lark. If we had to find a reason for liking what we like, we should never be able to like anything.

Socrates. Your politics is a matter of taste ?

The Stranger. Certainly ; but taste is sometimes modified by indigestion.

Socrates. I see : you simply obey your whim or inclination, until perhaps you sicken and are in danger of death. Your rulers are physicians summoned in your extremity : you have no trainers in your youth. We Greeks held our trainers and legislators in greater honour than our physicians : for no doctor could save us from death, but a trainer might render us fit for an Olympian victory. Perhaps your doctors promise to make you immortal ; which I should not think a benefit if you were never to be well. Art cannot be improvised under pressure. The man with a hole in his shoe is not forthwith a cobbler ; much less does a landsman become a pilot whenever he is seasick. Imagine yourself (who I suspect are no sailor) appointed to command a trireme in a storm or in a fog or in the thick of the battle of Salamis, not knowing the draught of your vessel, or the position of the rocks, or the tactics of the enemy, or even the words of command or with which hand to steer, but asking yourself what death to expect, while all hands waited on you for direction ; and I think your anxiety and suspense in such a nightmare, and the confusion and agony with which you would implore every

god, or the most humble fellow-creature, to relieve you of that task, though the fate of only one trireme was at stake, would be as nothing to the anguish which must assail the heart of an ignorant man voting in a moment of danger upon the government of his country.

The Stranger. No ignorant man among us, where the leaders are often ignorant, feels the least compunction in such a case, but only irritation and ill-will towards every other land-lubber who, in equal ignorance, insists on giving different orders; and each attributes the general confusion to the fact that his own voice was not heeded in time. Nevertheless we exist; and life among us is in many ways safer, freer, more comfortable, and more entertaining than it was in your model cities, with their divine founders and law-givers. There is an automatism in nature, Socrates, more fruitful than reason. Human beings, in all their dynamic relations, are bodies, although when they talk to themselves they may think they are minds. All their vital organs are unconscious and hereditary, and by instinct and imitation, without understanding, they learn to eat, to breed, to talk, and to govern. Every sturdy race stews its home-made dishes, to which its stomach is hardened and which it fondly relishes as incomparably the best. Few cooks anywhere are inventive — a fact which saves many lives; and our traditional government, like our home religion, though there is no science in it, is not too poisonous. The

sun rises in spite of it, and our children have red cheeks.

Socrates. The wild beasts, too, thrive on that principle. Nature has supplied them with all sorts of curious and complicated organs which mature in their season and insist on performing their unintended functions. Your institutions seem to be organs of that sort, for in following fashion or in trying private experiments you apparently obey some spontaneous instinct, or some balance of secret forces, and leave the issue to fortune. But the privilege of human reason, where reason exists, is to turn us into philosophers by teaching us to survey our destiny and to institute, within its bounds, the pursuit of perfection.

The Stranger. Perhaps the spirit in us, like that of some half-tamed beast, is not quite reconciled with its humanity. We prefer not to know our destiny and not to have any perfection set before us which we are not free to elude. Beneath what may seem to you our blind expedients in government—that we count heads as if we paid out money by weight, without asking whether it was gold or silver—I think there is a profound instinct of freedom. Society itself is an accident to the spirit, and if society in any of its forms is to be justified morally it must be justified at the bar of the individual conscience. In putting everything to a vote we are not so much supposing that the majority must be right as we are acknowledging, even at the risk of material disaster, the

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indefeasible right of each soul to determine its allegiances.

Socrates. Eloquence, by venting the feelings, sometimes clears the mind. Would you now be able, I wonder, to answer a simple question which I asked you at the beginning? Does right government mean good government?

The Stranger. No: I see now that there is a difference. Legitimacy in a government depends on the origin of its authority: excellence depends on its fruits.

Socrates. Then right government, resting, as your oracle has it, on the will of the governed, may be bad government?

The Stranger. Of course; nothing is commoner, especially when passions run high and nations or individuals attempt the impossible.

Socrates. You mean, for instance, that if an assembly with a great shout voted that every citizen should receive a large dole from the public treasury, that measure would accurately express their living desires, and the free choice of every bosom; yet it might bring no good, if at that moment the treasury was empty.

The Stranger. Evidently; but in that case at least the illusion would be short-lived. The bubbles we pursue in love or ambition often take longer to burst.

Socrates. And would you say that these bubbles, even when they lead you so long astray, are the right principles of action, and that you ought to follow them?

The Stranger. I am at a loss how to reply. If I say no, I condemn all life; if I say yes, I sanction every folly.

Socrates. Life, my good friend, is hard for you to understand because you are still living. Here we understand it. Not every passion pursues a bubble; not every treasury is empty. But living impulse, borne as it needs must be on its own wings, cannot distinguish; it cannot foresee the end, so as to push on where success is promised, and halt in time where it is denied. Experience arrives too late for each of us, and the young, though more or less fortunate in disposition, are never born any wiser. But by instruction experience may be transmitted; a father may train his son; the gods too are merciful and send down precepts and inspirations; and the legislator, if we live in a civilized state, has instituted games and festivals and exercises by which youth can be moulded and turned towards such ambitions as may be satisfied with innocence. Life to this extent becomes an art and wisdom a tradition. The living cannot live well unless the dead govern them. Ah, if the Athenians, after dismissing me from their midst in a manner which, whether a benefit to them or not, was certainly a great advantage to me, had wisely decided to disenfranchise themselves in a body and, at every election, to ask the Shade of Socrates alone to decide and had counted only my single vote, Athens, I say, would still be standing, more beautiful in her simplicity than Pericles ever made

her with his brand new marbles, and richer in true poets and true philosophers than she ever was in sophists and comedians. But the living, twittering on the green bough, despise the wisdom of the dead which might insinuate something immortal into them and keep them from wholly dying.

The Stranger. Immortality, Socrates, although people often declaim about it, is a thing for which the truly living do not care. They wish, indeed, to go on living, because they are wound up to go, and any accident which threatens to stop them short is odious to them ; but that all their habits and thoughts should lapse successively and yield to something new, or to a timely silence which, being absolute, will never be perceived, does not disturb them ; such, they know by instinct, is the nature of existence. For this reason they allow only living desires to count in action, however frivolous or fatal those desires may be ; they wish to live and not merely not to die. Your Shade in its wisdom, annulling their wills and stopping their bawling mouths, would have seemed to them the most horrible of ghostly tyrants, and worse than the laws of the Medes and Persians or an infallible pope ; and you would have preserved your austere Athens to no purpose by your eternal decrees, because the living would have fled from it and left it empty. It is not right to impose old loves on a young soul or ancient justice on a new society. No tyranny is worse than that of a belated or fanatical conscience, oppressing a world

it does not understand in the name of another world which is non-existent.

Socrates. How often have I heard speeches like that from the clever men who filled the living Athens—or, since living and dying seem to be identical—the dying Athens of my day! A small question, however, troubled me in the midst of your eloquence. Imagine, as a mere hypothesis, that the Great King or my Shade interrupted the orgies or the star-gazing in which (as they say) we are habitually plunged, and that we commanded a useful bridge to be built, or unjust tax-gatherers to be punished, or temples and groves to be renewed and beautified, or that by resisting the desire of the people for largesses in their holiday moods, we were actually able to distribute doles to them in some year of famine, or by our foresight in fostering agriculture had prevented their distress, would all these acts of ours have been wrong and tyrannical because done on our own initiative, and not at the people's bidding?

The Stranger. I confess that practically it would make little difference who exercised the right of legislation, if in any case the laws and the spirit of the government were to be the same; but experience has taught us that the Great King and the assembled people would not pass the same laws or govern in the same interests.

Socrates. Your prejudice against the Great King or against my Shade as perpetual archon is then not absolute. You might consent to be governed by us if you thought us likely to govern

well, but you fear that our thoughts might be too kingly or too ghostly, and might divert your energies to royal or fantastic ends, despising your homely needs ?

The Stranger. Yes, that is what we fear.

Socrates. In such measure, however, as we actually governed well, would you not think us tyrants or our government illegitimate ?

The Stranger. No doubt in that case you would be accepted without credentials ; in fact, if your government was half decent, people would soon overflow with loyalty to you, and would build statues or altars in your honour.

Socrates. Then good government is always right government ?

The Stranger. That seems to follow from your argument, but I am not convinced. Compulsion is degrading in itself, and there is an intrinsic dignity in freedom.

Socrates. Is there an intrinsic dignity in the freedom of a blind man when the degrading restraint exercised by the dog or the child leading him is removed, and he walks over a precipice ?

The Stranger. Yes, if he is weary of being blind and of being led, and prefers to commit suicide.

Socrates. The dignity which you attribute to suicide would disappear, I suppose, if the moment the man felt himself falling through the void, he repented and gave a shriek of terror and despair ?

The Stranger. I assume, of course, that he knows his own mind.

Socrates. Ah, that is an important condition, a most important condition. And there are other things that perhaps he would need to know, if the dignity of his freedom was to be preserved. Suppose that at the very time of his suicide, Asclepius or some other healer of men was approaching with a salve which applied to the eyes would have restored them to sight; in killing himself just then would he not be a victim of tragic ignorance, acting contrary to his true desires?

The Stranger. How can you expect any one to adjust his action to what lies beyond his ken?

Socrates. How indeed? What freedom can there be in the helpless solitude of ignorance? What autonomy in being driven this way and that by wishes without self-knowledge? It is knowledge and knowledge only that may rule by divine right, no matter who possesses that knowledge and, possessing it, gives the word of command. Without knowledge there is no authority in the will, either over itself or over others, but only violence and madness. And this knowledge necessary to virtue and to the right to will looks in two directions, first into the soul, to disentangle her true nature and discern the pursuits in which her innate powers might be liberated and developed; and then again into the world, to discover the opportunities, the aids, and the dangers which the soul must count upon in the exercise of her freedom. And with this, in consequence of your patient explanations, I think I may venture

to interpret that oracle which at first seemed so obscure. If the god had spoken in prose, without wishing to be oracular, he would have said that there is no right government except good government ; that good government is that which benefits the governed ; that the good of the governed is determined not by their topmost wishes or their ruling passions, but by their hidden nature and their real opportunities ; and that only knowledge, discovering this hidden nature and these real opportunities, and speaking in their name, has a right to rule in the state or in the private conscience.

I will not ask you to-day whether you agree with these conclusions, for I perceive that your mind is agitated, and you may prefer to reserve your decision. Another day we will renew the argument.

VII

ON SELF-GOVERNMENT

Second Dialogue

The Stranger. When I saw again, after our last conversation, the blue vault under which we mortals think that we live, though it is but our optical illusion, your doctrine itself assumed a new perspective in my memory. In these unframed spaces every spirit shines by its own light: but there an oblique external illumination casts everything into violent light and shadow, making a painted patchwork of the world, and hiding the profound labour going on patiently beneath Why should nature have endowed her creatures with senses so strangely caricaturing and foreshortening the facts? Doubtless because there is not time or strength in the soul, while yet alive, to conceive all things justly, but only to catch such glimpses of them as may suffice to lend a name to her pleasures and sorrows, and help her to sketch the outlines of her destiny. That which happens to the eye in the presence of bodies, happens on earth to the understanding in the presence of alien thoughts. These we must distort, if we do not altogether neglect them: yet this very neglect or

distortion is a speaking picture of our condition: we are militant souls, fighting in the stifling armour of the body, stunned and bleeding by many a wound. How should we do more than occasionally spy an enemy, or whisper to a friend? In you, Socrates, I have always recognized the truest and greatest of friends, though you knew nothing of it; but the best physician is not always able to cure, nor the most merciful deity to save: the disease is rooted in nature. So on this occasion you had plainly shown that government was right only when beneficent, and that good self-government must rest on self-knowledge; but it seemed to me, looking at things again in the violent light of day, that in discovering his own nature and his opportunities, a man was himself the best explorer, and each nation the best judge of its own case: so that the control of action by personal impulse or by popular vote might be the wisest after all. Any external authority would be sure to rule in some abstract interest, and to sail by an obsolete chart. All precepts inspired by past experience are, in one sense, impertinent: they assume that in the virgin rock of futurity there are no veins unworked and no glint of anything perhaps more precious than gold.

Socrates. You confirm a story I once heard concerning the firmament of your world, that it was an egg-shell within which the soul, already quickened, was not yet hatched: her true life would begin when that shell was shattered and she found herself in the open. That warm close

universe, with its flashes of phosphorescence which you call day, has been the womb of all of us : let us preserve a grateful piety towards our unconscious parent. You enjoy the singular privilege of partly anticipating your birth, by putting your callow head now and then out of the shell and taking a peep at eternity ; but you do well to draw back again quickly, in order to go on growing in the dreamful safety of your nest, and blindly strengthening your eyes and feathers : you are not ready yet for the air. And this last embryonic interval of yours seems to have been particularly fruitful ; you come back in a flutter of rich impulses and divinations, such as embryos should have. But you know the laws of my Republic in regard to every new birth, no matter how exalted its parentage. It must be submitted to the magistrate for inspection, and unless found healthy and perfect it must be unflinchingly put out of the way. It would not be merciful to a monster to allow it to live, or merciful to the commonwealth to suffer monsters to dwell in it. Let us then examine your offspring together : and may it stand the test.

The Stranger. You need not hesitate on my account to condemn it. I feel no great affection or even pity for this doctrine of democracy, which came to me not as my own child, nor even as a foundling left at my door, but as a sort of figment of words or obsession in a dream : and if you blow on the phantom and prove it a gas-baby, you will leave me no poorer and more at ease.

Socrates. Let us inspect it without prejudice.

Sometimes the greatest discoveries wear at first a disquieting or nebulous form. Did not people call me a sophist, and was it not out of sophistry that I plucked the unshakable humility of my wisdom? You say, then, that external authority is ill fitted to discern the good, which is more likely to be revealed by the voice of personal impulse, or of the whole people casting their votes. In respect to impulse you might point, for instance, to the young of man and the other mammals, who instinctively save their lives by taking the breast which the mother, in a smiling torpor, is happy to give them: whereas if a conclave of astrologers, never having noticed such lowly things, had been summoned to devise the right food for infants, not one of those learned men would ever have suggested a method so strangely elaborate and (as they would have said) so disgusting as being suckled at the breast; but if one of them was a follower of Thales, he might have urged that water, being the substance of all things, was undoubtedly in its pure state the most invigorating and the safest nourishment for a tender life; and another might have suggested that a little wine, the gift of the infant Bacchus, is the surest cause of warmth and movement in the system, and of inspiration in the mind; a third might have argued that, life being something divine and supernatural, it is best sustained if the wine is mixed with honey, because then it is called nectar and is the drink of the gods; another might have prescribed a diet of fresh grass, saying that grass is the stay of every strong and

blameless animal, such as the horse and the cow, and that all other foods are the mad contrivance of luxury or of ferocity, and a sure cause of disease ; yet another, a logician, might have proved that only solids can enlarge solids, so that for the right growth of a child's body—body being a solid by definition—all liquids were superfluous ; while a rival member of the same school of thought, admitting that only like can produce like, might have declared it absurd to expect that life should be sustained upon dead substances, and would have commanded all infants to be fed on nothing but gnats, flies, worms, beetles, and caterpillars, to be swallowed alive. Meantime, after all these sages, and those who listened to them, had died childless, the vulgar who had ignorantly followed their instinct would have preserved mankind from extinction and repeopled the earth.

The Stranger. How comes it, Socrates, that you are found to-day making merry at the expense of knowledge ?

Socrates. Is it knowledge not to know that milk is for babes ? The childish instinct to cry disconsolately until given suck is a philosophical instinct. It demands something which is probably obtainable, and which, when obtained, will prove pleasant and wholesome. Philosophy could do no better. Now, may I presume that the instincts which you regard as safe guides in government are all instincts of this wise kind, playing into the hands of nature, finding what they seek, and thriving upon it ?

The Stranger. The natural sanction of instinct is seldom immediate. What I mean is only that an impulse at least points to some satisfaction, whether obtainable or not, so that every impulse has an initial right to be given a trial, and every vote a right to be counted.

Socrates. Each of those astrologers in council, for instance, would have a right to make trial of his method, at least on his own children ?

The Stranger. Your example is grotesque, because everybody knows what young children require : but if the case were novel, and experience had not proved the point *ad nauseam*, it would be right for every man to try the method which seemed to him best.

Socrates. So long as men are ignorant, their conduct, according to your principles, is always right, and they must have their way ? Their folly becomes folly only when they discover it to be so ; and only death or disaster can rightly prevent them from continuing in the courses which up to that fatal moment have been perfectly right ?

The Stranger. No doubt when a man is disappointed at the result of his action he may say he has made a mistake, and may call that action wrong ; but it hardly follows that it was wrong to have made the experiment, or even to make it again, if the circumstances seem more favourable ; and in any case he remains the judge of his own error, and the corrected course which he should steer in future is always that which his private

instinct, enlightened by his experience, now prompts him to choose.

Socrates. And meanwhile, in those political actions which men can execute only in common, how is the right course determined ? For instance, if there was only one child, the king's son and heir, to be nursed by all those astrologers, how would you decide on which of their scientific foods the young prince should be fed ?

The Stranger. There would be a ballot, in which each doctor, after recommending his own nostrum, would indicate his second choice ; and the voting would be continued until every one being exhausted by fatigue and sleeplessness, a majority was obtained in despair for no matter what compromise ; and on that expert recipe the hope of the nation would be brought up.

Socrates. I am lost in admiration at the wisdom of your procedure. In Hellas we made trial of many forms of government—of all, as we fondly thought, that human ingenuity could devise ; but we underestimated the fertility of time. How I regret that before framing my ideal Republic I could not have seen your system at work ! For there are occasions on which, in my ignorance, I cannot imagine how you would apply your principles. If, for instance, some monster—for time breeds monsters too—should be born among you, and if one day Briareus should enter your assembly and raise his hundred hands at once, or if Hydra should shriek a thousand discordant opinions out of her thousand mouths, would he

or she count for one citizen according to your laws, or for a hundred or a thousand ?

The Stranger. The case is less mythical than it sounds, and we actually have something of the sort in our press and our political parties ; but no practical difficulty arises, because our monsters are not separate beings, but are composed of men and women packed closely together and compelled to move in unison ; and each of these Trojan horses, as it were, which fight all our battles for us, counts for as many votes as it carries individuals tucked under its hide.

Socrates. Ah, yes ; your citizen is your only sovereign, and all his thoughts and motions are dictated to him by some impersonal organism, to which he is subject he knows not why. But what are the limits of your citizenship ? Does good husbandry, according to your traditions, consider the interests of all the ants in the ant-hills of your country, lest your husbandmen, certainly far fewer than the ants in number, should unjustly drive the plough through those ant-hills, trampling on the interests and passions of the majority ? Do not reply too hastily ; for on second thoughts I am confident you would not allow the small stature or the black colour of ants to prejudice you against their rights as living creatures ; and the accident that they are too busy at home to come and vote in the agora ought not to count against them ; for I suppose the interests of children and sick people and old men, who are not able to jostle their way to the

voting-booths, are not neglected in your just democracy, but your chief magistrate or high priest or some vestal virgin especially appointed doubtless rises solemnly in your assembly, amid a general hush, and casts a vote in their name.

The Stranger. We are not pious. Nothing of the sort ever enters our heads.

Socrates. That seems very strange to me, when I consider the principle which you say governs your politics. But there is another class, so very numerous and important, that I am sure your legislators must have found a means of counting their votes, although there may be some material difficulty in doing so: I mean the dead. For who can have a greater stake in a country than its founders, whose whole soul and single hope was devoted to establishing it, that it might last and be true to their thought for ever; or than the soldiers who in many wars have successively given their lives to preserve it? Surely at every meeting of your assembly their votes are counted first, which they once cast so solemnly and sincerely, and at so great a sacrifice to themselves for your sake; and their veto is interposed beforehand against any rash measure that might undo their labours, stultify their hopes, and banish their spirit from the house which they built and loved.

The Stranger. No; the dead have no vote among us. On the contrary, we think they have too much influence as it is without voting, because they have bequeathed institutions to us which

encumber our playground and are not to our liking; and the inertia which these institutions oppose to our fresh desires seems to us a hateful force, which we call the dead hand.

Socrates. Do you mean that every young rascal, who knows nothing of the origin and laws of his country, and has never done anything in it but be born, may cast a vote, or that foreigners fleeing from famine or seeking by trade to enrich themselves privately, although in their hearts they may be sworn enemies to the land that receives them, may cast a vote also, but that the founders and defenders of it are not suffered to make their voices heard, because they happen to be dead? I, who am dead myself, see a great injustice in that. But let us return to the living. I suppose when the inhabitants of some town or quarter wish to rebuild their temple, or to found a new one, they gather together to draw up the plans; and when, in response to their living desires, or to those of a majority, they have chosen the site, selected the materials, designed the structure, and estimated the cost, they depute one of their own number, as nearly an average man as possible, to carry out the project. After six months or a year they do not forget to come together again, to revise the plans and make sure that the site first chosen is still convenient, and the work done so far is still expressive of the popular taste; and lest the architect formerly appointed may have been too much absorbed in his official function, and may have acquired autocratic habits, and

notions of architectural art not drawn from popular feeling, they hasten to revoke his commission and to appoint a new architect, more in sympathy with the life of the moment, and not tempted to execute any work which the assembled people, by a divine inspiration, have not first conceived in idea.

The Stranger. If the architect was not more fertile in invention and resourceful in methods than is the average citizen, why should he be distinguished by that title at all ?

Socrates. That is a question I meant to ask you, and I expected you to reply, in the name of your friends, that they were all equally skilful architects and physicians and generals, and that each took on each of these titles when he happened to be exercising that particular art ; moreover, that special masters in any art were required only in ill-governed states, where the people were not perfectly educated, but that in a model state all human undertakings would be executed as the ants and the bees build their cities ; for all, or nearly all, of them are builders, unanimous without control, and a common impulse joins them in labours which prove providentially to be harmonious. So I seem to see the artists in your happy society adding each his niche to the sculptured hive, and making it rich by a divine and unconscious co-operation. The spirit in them marshals them without words. Alas, we poor Athenians could practise the arts only through rare and exceptional masters, not being inspired,

as you all are to-day, to execute the most difficult works spontaneously and without instruction. But I am letting my enthusiasm run away with me, when I ought rather to be asking you to describe your principles in practice. If, for instance, some enemy attacks you and you find yourselves at war, I suppose you seize the weapons which you have at hand, provided by your private love of contrivances or of the chase, and rush with one accord upon that enemy, routing him easily at the first onset by your common ardour and instinctive tactics.

The Stranger. No. That is the method of wolves or of savage tribes. In our states, which are of enormous extent and population, the generals and other officers are designated beforehand, and trained by long study and exercises in time of peace ; and our arsenals are provided with all kinds of engines of war, with artisans skilful in making and managing them ; and even our common soldiers, if they are not to go like sheep to the slaughter, must undergo a long discipline at home before they are ever sent into the battle, in which they must endure all sorts of dangers and hardships blindly, not seeing the enemy, and trusting to the word and art of their superiors for every movement and every hope.

Socrates. I am astonished. How can it be that, having such excellent methods of government, you do not apply them to the principal function of your government, which is the protection of your lives ? But perhaps war is too

rough a business for such noble principles to work in ; they may apply only to higher things. If, for example, you are not merely building a temple, but giving a name to the god that is to be worshipped there, I suppose your people gather in an assembly and elect their god, and by a common inspiration compose the fable that is to be religiously associated with his name, as well as the rites with which, on pain of disaster, he shall be honoured, and the form the sculptor shall give to his image ; and when all this has been settled by vote, I suppose you vote on a still more important question, and decide it by a majority : I mean, what benefits this god shall bestow on you, and whether he shall protect you from drought or from pestilence, or shall inspire you with martial ardour or with ravishing music, or shall make you rich, or beautiful, or immortal, or whatever it be that you, or the majority of you, happen most to desire.

The Stranger. I suspect you are laughing at us ; but in all seriousness that is very much how we proceed in matters of religion. For deities of the earth and sea, for stories of wonders, for local shrines or images black with age whose origin is lost in antiquity, we have scant respect ; but our prophets and philosophers discuss angrily what ought to be the nature of God, whom each defines according to his own preferences ; and few of them hesitate to demolish old temples and old notions of the gods, or even to deny their existence, and to substitute the idea which most flatters the

mood of the age, and call this new idea the only true God. And even if we do not vote openly for one god or another to preside over us, yet by an insensible movement of public opinion we abandon the gods we dislike for others that we like better, and we never rest until we have adopted one that lays on us no commandment not to our own mind, and promises us all we wish.

Socrates. And when you have found such an amiable god, and abolished all those who were dangerous, I suppose calamities cease among you, passion and madness no longer distract any mind, there are no more floods, earthquakes, pestilences, or wars, and a serene happiness reigns in your hearts and in your cities.

The Stranger. Not at all. Human destiny remains precisely as before, save that religion has a smaller part in it, turns to private doubts or fancies, or vanishes altogether.

Socrates. Those who worship the statues of the gods, rather than the gods themselves, are called idolaters, are they not ?

The Stranger. Yes.

Socrates. And if a man worshipped an image of some god in his own mind, rather than the power which actually controls his destiny, he would be worshipping an idol ?

The Stranger. The principle would be the same ; but usage among us applies the word idol to the products of sculpture, not to those of poetry.

Socrates. Then, in principle, your prophets and philosophers are sheer idolaters ?

The Stranger. They would be, if they took their religion seriously, as you did yours in the old days ; but their religion has nothing to do with their business or politics, or with their practical estimation of good and evil fortune ; it is merely the solace of their dreamful hours. People now are hardly aware that the object of continual piety and studious reverence in the most ancient religions was the power that actually and hourly rules over men, whatever may be its nature or its contempt for human interests, the very power that still rules the world without human suffrage. This real power we make the object of science and of profitable art, but not of what we now call religion.

Socrates. But at least in respect to that other luxurious religion of theirs, which you think is in principle mere idolatry, your friends apply their fine theory of government by the will of the governed, deputing some chosen god to legislate for them according to their own wishes. Do they apply the same theory, I wonder, in that humbler region to which religion was addressed of old, the region of our daily and national fortunes ? Do they apply it, for instance, to the household ? Do your little boys and girls, after playing in the street together, vote to become brothers and sisters, and elect a father and mother ? You smile, as if my question were ironical, but I assure you I am in earnest, and

think it a momentous question. For if the father and the mother do not hold their office by the consent of their children, and have not become their father and mother in obedience to the children's will, then according to your principles of government all parental authority is usurped, and no parent's command or control is legitimate ; and it was an act of selfish and outrageous tyranny on the part of the father and mother to beget a helpless child, and bring him up by force in their own family, when very likely, had he been consulted, he would have chosen different parents and a finer home. I hardly know what to admire most, whether the simplicity of your principles, or the excellence of the society that would arise if they could be thoroughly applied. After abolishing the old gods (which can be done with a breath) you will doubtless abolish the ridiculous old methods of animal generation, and establish something more decent ; and by a majority vote you will reform the configuration and climate of the earth, and decide what shall have been the history of your country, and what shall be its future language and arts ; and you will begin, I hope, by voting yourselves a much greater intelligence than that with which chance has endowed you.

The Stranger. I blush, Socrates, at the foolishness and impiety of the views which I might almost have adopted, if your voice of warning had not reached me in time.

Socrates. There is nothing surprising to me

in the influence exercised over mankind by those who flatter it with eloquence. There were sophists in my day too. But I suspect that the fundamental order of human life is settled for you now, as it was for us then, independently of pert opinion, by nature and fortune and divine decrees, sophistry itself being but headiness in ill-bred mortals, when Apollo has withdrawn to another part of the heavens. I think, too, that right conscience in a natural creature can be nothing but self-knowledge, by which the man discovers his own nature and the good on which it is set; so that the margin of free choice and initiative for a man of understanding is exceedingly narrow, and grows narrower as the field of his competence grows wider and his science clearer, all art being but nature enlightened and directed upon its natural good. But doubtless your friends on earth are masters of magic, and are inspired with an infused wisdom which was always denied me. You will do well to return to them with my doubts fresh in mind; and after listening to the weighty considerations which they will doubtless invoke in support of their opinions you will be able to form your own at leisure; for it would be of little profit to have been saved from one error if, under my blind guidance, you fell into another.

VIII

THE PHILANTHROPIST

Socrates. According to your reports, inveterate Wanderer, you come from an unhomely world; but you are hardened to living without a home or country, and perhaps you relish unhomeliness. I was never in my own person an emulator of Odysseus or given to travel. There are, I know, no end of creatures and commonwealths, animal or divine, which nature can produce in her exuberance; but they are not models for Athens or for me. I therefore dismiss them with respect, and relinquish the study of them to the young Cambyses—you know the story—that son of the Great King who spent his youth observing the wild beasts kept in cages and pits in his father's park. Such study, the king had said to him, would prepare him for understanding and taming his future subjects, all whose passions he might see unfeigned and pure in the brutes. This prince was to rule over barbarians, and his education was doubtless well fitted to his destiny, and the historians do not inform us whether at the same time he learned to imitate the beasts himself. As for me, my guardian genius never allowed me to study zoology except in man, and condemned

me to be a narrow philanthropist, so enamoured of mere man that nothing not human could hold my serious attention. Yet in the home park of the human soul I found a perfect replica of that king's preserves ; for it was full of growling and fluttering passions, which I endeavoured to trap in a net of words and to train to abandon their ferocity and live together in peace. I fondly hoped that the voice of reason might have no less magic in it than the songs of Orpheus, and might render a man ashamed and unwilling to contradict himself. Nor was I always disappointed, and my single love of man was confirmed on finding him a tamable monster. What can be more virile and noble than a pack of wild instincts halting to be just ? In my day, to my sorrow, the passions of the many were bursting from their cages and returning to the jungle, as they seem to be doing among you now ; but a few tempered spirits survived, especially among the well-born youths who frequented my society ; and even the wildest of them, like Alcibiades, paid to reason at least the homage of shame, and some pure image of honour still shone in the midst of their vices, like a patch of blue sky reflected in a well. That part of them I still could love ; else I might have been reduced, like Diogenes (who had not the art of friendship), to carrying a lamp by day and looking for an honest man in the gutter ; and I might have fallen to hating all men for disfiguring humanity instead of loving them, as I did, for that vestige of humanity which was still in them.

The Stranger. What other standard of human nature, Socrates, can you propose except the nature of actual man? If you are a friend of humanity should you not cultivate all mankind, accept all their types, share all their pleasures, and be pleased with all their oddities? Else it might seem that what you loved was not mankind but only your own pets or your own fancies. I know that by nature you are a true lover and that the good and the beautiful deeply engage your allegiance, wherever they are found; but the blind bigots who in my day call themselves philanthropists and are always invoking humanity are the least human of men, utterly intolerant of that natural freedom which sometimes renders life glorious in spite of its sadness, be it in religion, patriotism, sport, or fancy. They are tender only to the vermin in the lion's skin, and their philanthropy is sheer hatred of everything that might make men worth loving.

Socrates. You attack me boldly, well knowing that I am helpless against eloquence and invective. I could not defend myself before my judges in Athens, who were plain men, when a false accusation was brought against me; and how shall I defend myself now against you, who say you are a philosopher and who, therefore, are bringing charges which are probably true? However, you are but one accuser, and I need not address you in a set speech, as if you were a crowd; and perhaps, if you will answer a few questions that trouble my own mind, I may agree that I am

guilty or you that I am innocent. You say, do you not, that I am no philanthropist, because a philanthropist should love men as they are, whereas I, falsely calling myself a lover of men, love only my notion of what men should be ?

The Stranger. Yes, some such feeling was in my mind.

Socrates. Now would you say that the love which a man has for himself is genuine or feigned and hypocritical ?

The Stranger. Unmistakably genuine.

Socrates. And does he love himself as he actually is or rather as he would wish to be ?

The Stranger. That is a hard question.

Socrates. Suppose I have two friends, one who knows and loves me exactly as I am, describing me with gusto as an old, pot-bellied, bald, mechanical rogue, useless and tiresome, and another friend (perhaps you yourself) who knows and loves me as I should like to have been, calling me the daylight conscience of Athens or a discerner and companion of all that is beautiful : which of these two friends do you think I should regard as truly sympathetic and as sharing with me the genuine love which I have for myself ?

The Stranger. In this case certainly the flatterer would be the better critic and would describe the deeper truth.

Socrates. Is not, then, the true philanthropist a flatterer of mankind, not, of course, like a politician for his own advancement, but as the self-love of mankind is itself a flatterer, seeing their better

side and their missed possibilities, and loving them as they would wish to be rather than as they are ?

The Stranger. I suppose that our wishes and ideals are a part of our present selves, and that a true lover of men would not love them apart from that idealism in them which keeps them alive and human.

Socrates. If a boy has been reading the *Odyssey* and wishes to be wrecked on a desert island and to become king over it, that day-dream is a part of the boy; and if you truly love the boy, you must love that day-dream in him. Is that your meaning ?

The Stranger. I should not wish him, at his age, to be without something of the sort ; and I certainly should like a boy the better for being fond of the *Odyssey*.

Socrates. And if the boy attempted to set sail alone in a small boat, hoping to be actually wrecked, would you wish the same thing for him in consequence of your affection ?

The Stranger. Of course, he must be prevented.

Socrates. How, then, does the argument stand ? Men, you say, love themselves as they wish to be, but the philanthropist loves them as they are and is ready, in some cases, to prevent them by force from realizing their desires ; and yet he wishes them, at least if they are boys, to cultivate those desires without realizing them ? Is that the position ?

The Stranger. So it would seem.

Socrates. Perhaps our supposition was unnatural, because boys, even when fond of the *Odyssey* and of gloating over imaginary adventures, are in fact little cowards, and would be terrified at finding themselves adrift, I will not say at sea, but in a duck-pond. Let us suppose that our young hero was rendered so exceptionally brave not simply by reading the *Odyssey*, but by falling into a fever after reading it, and becoming delirious ; and let us suppose that in his lucid intervals he did not wish to be wrecked, but to get well. Now if you were a true friend to that boy would you share his wish in this instance, actually assisting him, to the best of your knowledge and power, to recover his health as soon as possible, or would you still, as in the other instance, love him and wish him to remain just as he was, intermittently feverish and entertaining at intervals the warm ideals proper to a fever, without, of course, ever reducing them to act ?

The Stranger. You are bringing ridicule upon me, but not conviction.

Socrates. All the ridicule I may bring upon you will not hurt you, if you bring no ridicule upon yourself. But let us coldly consider the facts. Suppose some one is found so entirely devoted to your interests that he never exercises his own judgement but labours to carry out instantly your every wish : would you think him the best of friends ?

The Stranger. I should think him a good servant. A friend may do an occasional service,

and a servant, in his feelings, may be sometimes a friend ; but service is not true friendship. A good servant follows my directions, a bad one studies my character in order to profit by my foibles, as a demagogue studies public opinion. A friend would rather communicate to me his own pleasures and insights.

Socrates. Partners in vice are not true friends ?

The Stranger. No, they are accomplices. All your boon-companions, adulterous lovers, fellow-conspirators, bandits, and partisans may imagine that they are friends pursuing a common interest, but in reality each obeys a private impulse and cares only for his own dream. The others are but his chance instruments in debauch. Presently they will fall out over the spoils or take to railing at one another for failure or treachery.

Socrates. But what of those who, as the phrase is, are in love ?

The Stranger. Each of them, too, is moved by a private mysterious passion. At first they are in a flutter, or love-sick and full of dreams ; later they pursue each other with sensitive claims, exactions, and jealousies. Sometimes, for a while, they are wildly happy ; then they begin to feel imprisoned, and perhaps grow bitter and quarrelsome, even to the point of violence and murder.

Socrates. Is there not often a lifelong and tender affection between husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters ?

The Stranger. There is : sometimes sugary, sometimes seasoned with a little sarcasm.

Socrates. At least young children, red-cheeked and vigorous, running and romping about with shrill cries, must be a perfect delight to you?

The Stranger. Yes, for half an hour.

Socrates. You find more peace, no doubt, among wrinkled white-bearded elders sitting in the sun or tottering on knotted staves, well pleased with themselves and their old saws?

The Stranger. They, too, are picturesque, but at their best in the background. Otherwise such old men are a danger to philanthropy.

Socrates. I see that your preference, like mine, is decidedly for the plastic and generous temper of young men, who embody human health and freedom to perfection.

The Stranger. Yes, but our preference in this matter is three-quarters illusion. In reality, what is a youth but a tadpole? And what can be more odious than their conceit when they have some cleverness and transgress their sphere?

Socrates. What? Are you entirely weaned from the love of images? Do you now prize nothing in man save his active virtues, such as can be exercised in their fullness only in middle life?

The Stranger. Active virtues? Say rather active vices. Men in middle life are for the most part immersed in affairs to which they give too much importance, having sold their souls to some sardonic passion and become dangerous and repulsive beasts.

Socrates. What, then, is your conclusion? That the one great obstacle to philanthropy is man?

The Stranger. You forget woman.

Socrates. Alas, shade of Xanthippe, it is not easy to forget her. Woman is the eternal impediment.

The Stranger. Being incomplete she wishes man to be so, and her ascendancy is a wile of nature that keeps the race jogging along in spite of all the philosophers. Nowadays the manly heart is entirely dominated by the sentiments she inspires or by those she approves. Nor does he think this woman-worship degrading; integrity is out of date; and in woman he seems to find concentrated all the beauty and fineness, all the ardour and religion, that still remain in the world.

Socrates. Can it be so bad as that? You are indulging, I know, your spleen or your fancy; yet after painting such a picture of mankind, can you still maintain that true philanthropy must be love of men and women as they are? If you care for them at all, must it not be your constant endeavour entirely to transform them?

The Stranger. I begin to see your drift and the refutation which you intend me to supply to my own opinion. Let me then expedite my fate, and confess at once that the philanthropist should strive to secure the *true* good of mankind, a good predetermined for them by their nature and faculties without their knowledge, and by no means realized in their actual condition nor expressed in their loose wishes, nor always furthered by their political maxims and superstitious morality. This was what I had in mind,

though I expressed myself badly, when I said that the true philanthropist loves men as they are: for their true nature is not adequately manifested in their condition at any moment, or in their words and thoughts vapidly flowing, or even in their prevalent habits. Their real nature is what they would discover themselves to be if they possessed self-knowledge or, as the Indian scripture has it, if they became what they are. This admission, Socrates, does not remove the objection which I have to meddlesome censors calling themselves philanthropists, but abounding only in their own conceit, and wedded to their nostrums. Let them help me, as you so generously help me, to know myself; but let them not browbeat me in the name of virtue, seeking to palm off their prejudices upon me as moral first principles, which would turn my whole life, if I followed them, into a slow and miserable suicide.

Socrates. You go faster and farther than is safe. But let us agree that the philanthropist is a diviner. The scars and deformities of men do not beguile him: would they be deformities or scars if there were no whole and beautiful humanity beneath which they could disfigure? The lover's eye when most open is most full of dreams; it pierces through the incrustations of fortune, or does not perceive them, and sees only the naked image of the god beneath.

The Stranger. My doubts, as I listen, return upon me. If this divine pattern in man became all in all, would the creature be still any man in

particular, or a man at all? Would he not cease to exist and to live, being sublimated into the mere idea of himself in an unchanging mind? And the so-called philanthropist who loved him would not be loving a man, but rather a picture and a detail in the mind of God.

Socrates. Perhaps. But let me ask you a question, since you are so familiar with these high mysteries. Would the divine spirit, as you conceive it, entertain many thoughts?

The Stranger. Yes: all possible thoughts, or at least all good thoughts.

Socrates. And when, in your opinion, is a thought good? When it sets before the mind the round or the square, the odd or the even, the one or the many?

The Stranger. No: when there is some living creature to whom that thought, if realized, would be happiness.

Socrates. Then, if I understand you, the thoughts which, when habitually expressed in man's life, would make his happiness would also be the idea of humanity in the divine mind?

The Stranger. Exactly.

Socrates. But in the divine mind, according to your theory, there would be many other ideas as well?

The Stranger. Of course.

Socrates. Then consider my case. The other good thoughts which, according to you, fill the divine mind, I respectfully leave out of my investigation and concern, because they form no

part of a perfect humanity. If nevertheless you inform me that in loving human perfection I love a divine idea, I am content to have it so. Very likely all good thoughts, as you say, are divine ideas. But I am no theologian, and I prize this particular idea, and know it to be good, not because you tell me that it is one of the ideas in the divine intellect, but because there is a living creature familiar to me to whom the realization of that idea is happiness ; so that my exclusive attachment to this particular divine idea marks me out as a lover of man rather than of God.

The Stranger. Your demonstration is cogent, and I gladly acknowledge that you are a pure philanthropist. You may well prefer to suspend judgement on all questions concerning the cosmos and the gods, considered as alleged facts, the objects of science or of fear ; for what are the gods, to a moralist or a true mystic, save that which he prizes in his own nature, raised in fancy to perfection and immortality ? I think, Socrates, that as usual you are subtly ironical when you say that you are a lover of man and not of God ; for at heart you are a mystic and a hermit whose wilderness is human society ; and it is impossible for you, in spite of your banter, to love man otherwise than religiously, as an idea in God. Yet what is any idea but an eternal essence ? So that, unless men had enacted it in time and in the world of matter, expressing it piece-meal in their blundering careers, mankind never would have existed ; there could have been no trepida-

tion in love, and no fraternal fondness of man for man, such as prompts them to assist, to embrace, or to forgive one another. I am far from forgetting that in your admonitions, too, there is infinite kindness, because you do not prescribe our natures for us, but ask us, and before we find words to tell you, your sympathy anticipates our confession, and reveals to us our secret heart. But for all that I am somehow dissatisfied. You are the friend of youth, of the soul flushed with brave hopes, and you teach us to disentangle and understand our loves, and so to train ourselves in art and government that life in our cities may be both free and beautiful. You are the prophet of success. But how much success is there or has there ever been on earth? Who shall be the prophet of old age, of sorrow, of servitude? What god shall help us where we have failed?

Socrates. Can even a god help you there?

The Stranger. That is the mystery.

Socrates. Then let us pass it by. The initiated, who alone understand mysteries, have sworn not to reveal them.

The Stranger. In the religion which the Greeks adopted after your time, mysteries are public; in the midst of them is sung a hymn: "Publish, O tongue, the mystery," and though I am but a lame mystic and hardly initiated, I should undertake to publish it, if you did not forbid.

Socrates. Publish it by all means.

The Stranger. The sum of it is this: that we

must leave glory to God and be content with failure for ourselves.

Socrates. Is your God, then, an enemy to man, that he finds his glory in the ruin of his creatures ?

The Stranger. Their ruin is a part of their mode of existence, as the silence which follows upon speech is part of its eloquence. The founder of our spiritual city saw in God, whom he called his Father, a great lover of life, as you, too, once called him : but not a lover of human life only, or of any life only in its perfection. His hand had scattered bountifully throughout the chaos of matter the seeds of all sorts of perfections, setting the love and the need of a special perfection in each creature's heart ; but the path of any incarnate spirit, buried as it must be in matter and beset by accidents, is necessarily long and perilous; and few there are who ever reach the goal. Yet the perfections of all those who fall by the way and never attain perfection are none the less present for ever to the mind of God, and a part of his glory : and such of us as have no glory here may be content with our glory there. As to our life on earth, whether it ever touch perfection, as yours seemed to do for a moment in Greece, or be utterly distracted, as ours has been since, it must in any case presently perish : the torrent is too mighty for any swimmer. You may laugh at me, if you will, and call me a theologian ; yet we must somehow speak of nature and the gods, and how shall we ever speak of them except in parables ? Did you not yourself repeat a tale about the birth

of Love, that he was the child of Plenty and Want ? Let me then enlarge upon your apologue and say that the satisfaction which God finds eternally in the idea of human perfection, and in all other good ideas, is not properly called love, because there is no want and no sorrow in it ; it is but a part of his joy in the fullness of his own being. The true seat of love is matter, when its inner yearning and absolute want are, by chance, directed towards the idea of humanity, or towards any other divine idea. Now there have been prophets in India and even in Greece who have soared altogether above this painful love and have studied to become impassible and utterly blissful, even like God ; but the Prophet of Nazareth, who said he was the Son of God but also the son of man, taught and practised the love of man superhumanly, in a spirit that has never animated any other prophet ; so that his philanthropy bears a special name and is called charity.

Socrates. Anything you may tell me about your Prophet will not be without interest for me, because I have already heard sundry comparisons and couplings of his name with mine, and perhaps if his maxims were repeated to me by some rational person (which was never yet the case), they might teach me to correct or extend my own suppositions. What, for instance, is this charity of his, of which you speak so darkly ?

The Stranger. Definition is not my art ; yet perhaps if you will define philanthropy I may be able to add some qualification to mark the differ-

ence which I vaguely feel to exist between philanthropy and charity.

Socrates. Have we not defined philanthropy already? Is it not love of that beauty and goodness in man which if realized would make his happiness? In what, pray, is your charity more or less than that?

The Stranger. I will venture to improvise an answer, although I may soon have cause to retract it. Charity is less than philanthropy in that it expects the defeat of man's natural desires and accepts that defeat; and it is more than philanthropy in that, in the face of defeat, it brings consolation.

Socrates. But what, may I ask, are natural desires?

The Stranger. I don't mean mere whims or follies, whether in children or nations, which may be naturally inevitable but which a good regimen would weed out or allow to blow over. I mean profound aspirations, seated in our unregenerate nature, which fate nevertheless forbids us to realize, such as the desire to understand everything (which you, Socrates, have wisely renounced) or to be beautiful, or the first or free or immortal. The spirit in most of us has but a poor prospect. From the beginning we are compelled to put up with our parents, our country, our times, and the relentless approach of old age and death; and on the way we are lucky if we escape disease, deformity, crossed hopes, or desperate poverty. You may paint a picture of the Golden Age or of

an ideal republic in which these evils are softened, or are forgotten; but meantime we must endure them, and live and die in a far exile from our natural good. Charity is the friendship of one exile for another.

Socrates. You must excuse my dull wits, but I have not yet gathered from your eloquence whether the natural good from which you are banished is the happiness proper to man at home, or is perhaps the life of the gods in Olympus, to which you think yourself entitled and fitted by nature. Is a part of what troubles you, for instance, the fatality of having hands instead of wings? And might a bird, on the same principle, deeply suffer for the lack of hands, and require the ministrations of charity to reconcile him to being covered with feathers?

The Stranger. I confess that the life of birds, too, seems rather pitiful, and that even feasting for ever on nectar and ambrosia might be a dull business and cloying. Must not any incarnate spirit renounce beforehand almost everything that a free spirit might have desired?

Socrates. If there is an immortal spirit in every creature which chafes at its limitations, does it not also, at death, escape those limitations, and does it not live many another life in many another creature? Let us leave the fortunes of spirit to the hidden justice which probably rules the world and whose decrees, at any rate, we cannot alter. But in so far as spirit is incarnate in man and addressed to human happiness, it is not hampered by

the conditions of this human life but is supported by them. Man presupposes nature. Nature sets before him his proper virtue, as a child, as a soldier, as a father, as a cultivator of divine grace ; and he is happy if that grace descends upon him in all the offices of his humanity and renders him as nearly perfect as, amid the accidents of fortune, it is possible for a man to be. A man content to fail in his proper virtue would show himself a scorner of humanity and a misanthrope. If your Prophet, as I seem to have heard, despised in men all their proper virtue, their beauty, valour, enterprise, and science, and loved them only for being halt, blind, poor, and diseased in both mind and body, I do not understand in what respect I can be compared with him, or how his charity has any touch of philanthropy in it.

The Stranger. I think that our Prophet, if he had been man only, would have shared your philanthropy to the full, and that initially his heart would have longed with an even greater intensity than yours for all the beauty and splendour of existence. He was no coward, he was no eunuch ; but he was not sent (as he was wont to say) to speak for himself, to give voice to his own nature ; he was sent to speak in God's name, and to teach mankind to judge themselves as God judged them. Now God, being their creator, could not hate the soul which he had kindled in their dust ; and a man filled with the divine spirit could not bemoan the creation, or condemn the warmth and beauty which, at the word of God,

had turned that dust into flesh. Yet as the Father was not the creator of man alone, so the Son could not confine his sympathy to the human soul, but extended it to every creature, and also to that tragic economy by which the fortunes of each are determined according to the divine will. Thus in love for created things, when it is divinely inspired, there is perforce an element of impartiality, a conditioned allegiance, and a tenderness swallowed up in resignation, the love of God always dominating the love of man and being at bottom the only ground for it. For why should a religious mind foster the human will or share its aspirations at all, except because God has breathed that human will into some parcels of matter, being pleased that they should live after that human fashion? Hence the celestial colour of charity, which has passed through the presence and through the love of God as through an infinite fire, before reaching either the beauty or the suffering of any creature. Our Prophet did not look upon the world with the eyes of a mortal; he was deeply disenchanted with all the glories of which human life is capable. He ignored, with a compassionate indulgence, all liberal arts, sciences and ambitions: not one hint of comforts or sports or manly adventure, not one thought of political institutions to be built up laboriously or defended rationally or handed down as a heritage. The end of the world was at hand, as, indeed, it is for each of us in turn; and charity, knowing that events are in other hands, sees in mankind nothing but a

swarm of moths fluttering round the flame, each with its separate sorrow and its dazzled spirit, needing to be saved. His maxims were not those of a combatant, or a ranting moralist, or the founder of a prosperous state. He considered rather the lilies of the field, the little children, the sparrows ; even the tares among the wheat, though destined for the burning, and the hairs of a man's head were God's creatures ; the harlots and the publicans were also his children. Without expecting to extirpate evil so long as this world lasted, he went about healing and forgiving. In the midst of trouble the redeemed soul might be joyful, and even the body might often be restored in sympathy with the soul. A dissolving insight, a great renunciation, might bring peace suddenly to all who accepted it. All men, all creatures, might abandon their wilfulness, disclaim their possessions, and love one another. The saints might form, even on earth, a new society without war, greed, competition, or anxiety. Poverty or disgrace might be sweet to them in its sharpness, and they might thank God for their little sister, the death of the body. If smitten on one cheek they might turn the other, and when robbed of their cloak they might offer their tunic also. Leaving their nets upon the shore and their plough in mid-furrow, they might beg food and lodging from strangers ; and when these were refused, they might sit down starving by the wayside and praise God with a loud voice.

Socrates. Were such madmen and gymnosophists the men whom your Prophet loved ?

The Stranger. No, as a matter of fact, his heart went out rather to children, to frank young men, to women who themselves had loved, and to the common folk in fishing hamlets and in the streets of cities.

Socrates. Then his love of mankind might have been strangely chilled if mankind had followed his precepts ?

The Stranger. Such is the irony of reform. I can imagine the cold words that our saints will hear at the Last Day. And would you yourself, Socrates, have loved Alcibiades if he had resembled you, or Athens if it had been like Sparta ?

Socrates. Athens and Alcibiades were constant irritants to me, cruelly reminding me of what they ought to have been. How should I not have loved even the worst vehicle of so great a revelation ? There would be no irony in reform, my friend, if reform were guided by knowledge of human nature, and not by a captious imagination. Man is a natural being ; if he is ill at ease in the world, it is only because he is ignorant of the world and of his own good ; and the discord between man and nature would be wholly resolved if man would practise the true arts of medicine and politics. But your Prophet seems to have delivered precepts which, if ever his disciples had obeyed them, would have turned them into sanctified idiots, contemptible in his own eyes. He set before them as models other creatures, or

the gods, or the ways of the universe, thereby counselling them to destroy themselves; and I see no benefit which he conferred, or even wished to confer, upon mankind.

The Stranger. Metamorphosis, I suppose, is never strictly a benefit, because it changes the standard of values and alienates the heart from its old pursuits. It is such a metamorphosis of the spirit that our religion proposes to us, although of course none occurs in most of us, and our society remains perfectly animal and heathen. Yet the other note has sounded, and is sometimes heard. If you asked me for my own opinion, I should say that there is one great gift which our Prophet has bestowed on us, and that is himself. After all, is not that the best gift which a lover has to bestow, and the only one which a lover would much care to receive? That he should have walked among us; that he should have spoken those golden words, composed those parables so rich in simplicity, tenderness, and wisdom; that he should have done those works of mercy in which the material miracle was but the spark for the new flame of charity which it kindled; that he should have dismissed with a divine scorn and a perfect disillusion all the busy vanities of this world—the Pharisees with their orthodoxy, the Sadducees with their liberalism, the scribes with their scriptures; that he should have renounced family and nation and party and riches, and any other hope or notion of paradise than this very liberation and self-surrender of the soul--

that is his gift to mankind. Alone among dreaming mortals he seemed to be awake, because he knew that he was dreaming; the images and passions which bring illusion to others, although he felt them, brought no illusion to him. He had enough sympathy with blind life to understand it, to forgive it, to heal its wounds, to cover its shames, and even to foster it when innocent; yet that very understanding compelled him to renounce it all in his heart, continually draining his chalice to the dregs, and foreknowing the solitude of the cross. Thus the indwelling deity entirely transfigured without shattering his humanity, and the flame of love in him, though it rose and fell humanly as the miseries or the beauties of the world passed before his eyes, yet never had the least taint in it of impurity, moodiness, or favour. It was divine love, free from craving or decay. The saint and the blackguard alike were known to him at their true worth; in both he could see something disfigured or unattained, perhaps hidden from their own eyes, and yet the sole reason and root of their being, something simple and worthy of love beneath all their weakness or perversity; and the assurance of this divine love, so surprising and inexplicable, became to many the only warrant of their worth, and lent them courage not wholly to despise themselves, but to seek and to cleanse the pure pearl in their dung-hill, on which his own eye rested, and not without reason to call him the saviour of their souls.

Socrates. In all your words you are implying, if I understand you, that your Prophet was a god in the form of man ?

The Stranger. Yes.

Socrates. That is a point of difference between him and me which may justify the difference in our maxims. A god, even if for a moment he condescends to play the mortal, holds his immortality in reserve ; it is one thing to live and die in an assumed character, and another thing to live and die in the only character one has. We may presume, I suppose, that a god taking human shape is born freely, after having considered what form he should take and chosen his parents and the places he should haunt ? He would forecast and approve all the circumstances and actions likely to make up his earthly career ?

The Stranger. Of course ; that is precisely what we mean by saying that he is a god become man—a form of words to which unspeculative people might possibly take exception.

Socrates. But a mortal is born fatally and, as it were, against his will ; he finds himself, he knows not why or how, a man or a woman, a Greek or a barbarian, whole or maimed, happy or unhappy.

The Stranger. Such is the blind throw of existence. By that token the spirit knows that it was created and is not its own master.

Socrates. Nevertheless, would you not admit that during his mortal life a god in human form might at times forget the choice he had freely made, and the clear purpose of it, and might share

with mortals their surprise at events or their fears for the future ?

The Stranger. Yes, he would then actually have become a man, and not merely have appeared in the semblance of man in some walking vision, like a ghost in the sunshine. In such moments of obscured deity, he might taste anguish and death, and he might need to exercise faith and courage like any mortal, to whom his own true nature and that of the world are profoundly unknown.

Socrates. And yet would he have ceased to be a god ? Or would his substantial divinity be proved and vindicated if on awaking from his mortal confusion he remembered the choice of such an incarnation which he had freely made in the beginning, and all his immortal reasons for making it ?

The Stranger. The unity of his divine person would then be evident, because spirit is not divided by the differences in its objects, or by their sequence : on the contrary, in noting that sequence or those differences it manifests its scope and its intellectual essence.

Socrates. And for what reason can you conceive such a god to select the sort of mortal life through which he shall pass, or to remember it with pleasure after he has passed through it ?

The Stranger. I am at a loss to suggest any reason.

Socrates. Yet you have heard that the Egyptians, who were wise men and free from

vulgar prejudice, believed that one god affected the form of a cat, and another that of a monkey or a bull or an ibis ; and on the same principle, I suppose, some gods, whom we might call divine philanthropists, may have affected the form of man : and these are doubtless the gods whom we preferred to worship in Hellas.

The Stranger. I sympathize with your taste, and with that of your gods also.

Socrates. But not, I suppose, to the extent of rashly denying the wisdom of the Egyptians or the impartiality of the divine principle animating all the gods, no matter of what living function or form they may choose to be patrons. Now, leaving for a moment the Egyptians to their wisdom, I would ask you this : If some god is by temperament a philanthropist and meditates taking the human form, would you expect him to assimilate himself to all sorts of men equally, to become both man and woman, both white and black, both good and wicked ?

The Stranger. Evidently the same arbitrary choice, which you have just called temperament, leading him to choose a human life at all must lead him to choose some human life in particular.

Socrates. Might he then, as well as not, in order to show his friendship for man, be born a hunchback or an imbecile, or would he thirst to commit all the crimes and to catch all the infections of which human nature is capable ?

The Stranger. We have already dismissed that morbid romanticism.

Socrates. Would you at least expect him to plough and fish and dig for iron and quarry stone? Would he marry and build himself a house and supervise his domestic economy and the education of his children? Would he go down daily to bargain and argue and spit and vote in the agora?

The Stranger. All that sort of thing is certainly very human, and seems honourable enough in a man or, at least, inevitable: but somehow it is absurdly contrary to the nature of a god even if he was dwelling in disguise among men, and when seen in that light, as occupation for a god, it all becomes pitiful and ridiculous.

Socrates. Is it perhaps easier for you to imagine a god in human shape tending flocks or taming horses or dancing at a harvest feast, or wrestling with the young men in the palaestra and causing astonishment that one apparently so young and slender should throw the strongest and most skilful of them at the first encounter?

The Stranger. Yes, such theophanies are dear to the poets.

Socrates. And while you refuse to admit that a god could become a general and plan a battle and perhaps lose it, would you think it credible that he should swoop down into the fray to rescue some hero whom he especially favoured, or should transfix some other hero with an invisible arrow or with a glance, or should, by a word or a touch, bring a dead man to life?

The Stranger. Oh yes; such actions seem more congruous with a god in disguise.

Socrates. And without allowing him to become a husband and a householder, would you suffer him to woo some nymph, or perhaps to appear in the midst of a wedding feast and to carry off the bride, leaving the bridegroom open-mouthed and the whole company in confusion?

The Stranger. I am afraid, if we may trust popular tales, that he might do so without my permission.

Socrates. Is it even conceivable that he might secretly substitute himself for a woman's husband, or carry her away in a cloud to his own haunts, in order that by that gentle rape she might become the mother of a young hero?

The Stranger. That, too, is told of Zeus, and of other fabulous interlopers; but what is the purpose of all these examples?

Socrates. To discover, if possible, what elements of human life a spirit that freely chose to be human would admit into its experience. The poets who compose fables about the gods—and I suppose the same is true of those who report the apparitions of your Prophet—were moralists in poetic guise; they may have been rustics and their pleasures rude, but they were regaling themselves and their hearers with pictures of such lordly actions as they would have performed gladly, had their souls been freed from labour and restraint. It will be easy to preserve the principle of their morality while refining the illustration. You can conceive, for

instance, that Apollo or one of the Muses, if they loved mankind, might whisper perfect music or perfect truth into our ears ?

The Stranger. That would be true philanthropy on their part.

Socrates. Now pray tell me which were the pleasures and arts, comparable with those we have mentioned, that seemed to your Prophet and to the poets who composed his story to be arts and pleasures so liberal and so proper to human nature as not to be unworthy of a god wearing the form of man ?—You are silent. Can you possibly be asking yourself whether such sublime spirits could be haters of human nature rather than lovers of it ?

The Stranger. Is human nature one and invariable ? Of course in any man at any moment human nature will tend to some specific attainment, and according to our way of speaking that coveted perfection will be enshrined eternally in a divine idea. But the expression of that idea on earth will remain precarious, and human nature in actual men is an unstable compound. The next man, the next generation, the neighbouring nation, will tend to a different perfection. This, too, will be enshrined in a divine idea ; but there is no saying that one divine idea is better than another, or that the humanity of to-day is less or more human than that of yesterday. Each posture of life has its apposite perfection, which is truly divine inasmuch as labouring existence somewhere actually worships and pursues it. Why

call down imprecations on another creature for not being or not wishing to be like ourselves? The flux of matter brings now one idea and now another to the surface; and it is matter in us, and not reason or spirit, that struggles to bring one form into existence here and another there, or to defend and preserve it. A mighty pother it all makes, with much thunder and lightning from above, which Zeus sends down in sport or in derision. The sweetness and the terror of it are alike ephemeral. Meantime only two principles endure perpetually in the universe: the flux of matter in which every life is formed and dissolved, and the pure spirit which, chained to the mast like Odysseus among the Sirens, looks out upon the strange scene, as it has looked out from many another vessel on many another scene, both before and after. Now these two principles, being present everywhere and everlasting, are more akin than any passing perfection to the unknown God whom no man has chosen, the creator of man as of all other things; and our Prophet who was not one of those pleasant philanthropists, the gods of Greece, but was the Word of universal deity, spoke only for pure spirit in the throes of destiny, and not at all for human thrift or human vanity. You, Socrates, having a civilized soul, have firmly chosen to spend your days in the citadel of morality and to cultivate only those deities who are patrons of civil justice and the kindly arts; but in us barbarians there is still something unreclaimed and akin to the elements, a spirit as of

the hunter or the hermit or the wild poet, who is not happy in towns. The fields, the mountains, the sea, the life of plants and animals, the marvel of the stars or of intricate friendly forests in which to range alone, all seem to liberate in us something deeper than humanity, something untamable which we share with all God's creatures and possibly with God himself. I confess that my own spirit is not very romantic, and yet at times it would gladly dehumanize itself and be merged now in infinitely fertile matter, now in clear and unruffled mind ; and I am inclined to identify my being even now with these elements, in which I shall soon be lost, rather than with that odd creature which I call man, or that odder one which I call myself. Nothing can reconcile me to my personality save the knowledge that it is an absurd accident, that things pleasanter to think of exist in plenty, and that I may always retire from it into pure spirit with its impartial smile.

Socrates. Your pleasures, then, are not in man but in some faculty which you think you have of escaping from humanity ?

The Stranger. Neither matter nor spirit is foreign to human nature ; they run through it and pass beyond ; but the special human form which they take on for a moment is something to be accepted and dismissed without any passionate attachment.

Socrates. And if matter and spirit elsewhere should assume some other shape, would that non-human life please you better ?

The Stranger. Why should it please me better ? It would be subject to the same contingency, torment, and decay. I have no particular prejudice against the nest in which I was hatched, as if I were a reformer ; human ways please me ; I can laugh and shudder with the crowd. But any adoration of mankind is mere sentimentality, killed by contact with actual men and women. Towards actual people a doting love signifies silliness in the lover and injury to the beloved, until that love is chastened into charity—a sober and profound compassion, not counting alleged deserts, but succouring distress everywhere and helping all to endure their humanity and to renounce it.

Socrates. When a man gathers food, begets children, or defends himself and his country, is his love of life mere sentimentality ?

The Stranger. Of course not.

Socrates. Yet what is he pursuing in all those struggles save the continued existence of his humanity ?

The Stranger. I admit that the love of an idea is not sentimental when it inspires labour and art.

Socrates. Then have you not solved your original difficulty ?

The Stranger. What difficulty ?

Socrates. Your disinclination to believe that philanthropy is the love of an idea, and not of actual men and women ?

The Stranger. And have I overcome that disinclination ?

Socrates. Apparently, since you now admit that the love of life is itself love of an idea, and that philanthropy, in setting that idea more clearly before men's eyes and helping them to embody it more perfectly, is simply reinforcing their natural virtue.

The Stranger. I think this solution, as usual, has been found by you and not by me.

Socrates. You are too curious : but, at any rate, you have explained another matter which, as it touches the special tenets of your religion, you will not accuse me of having interpolated.

The Stranger. And what is that ?

Socrates. That a god cannot be a philanthropist, even if he chooses to take a human form. His divine mind can never give an exclusive importance to perfection in one kind of animal ; he may amiably foster humanity on occasion, but he will ultimately invite it to dissolve and to pass into something different. Therefore, a philanthropist, who is wedded to a human love, if he is inspired by a god at all, can be inspired only by some small whispering daemon peculiar to himself, whom perhaps he calls Reason. Will you wickedly pretend that this, too, is an invention of mine ? Never mind who first said it, if we both agree that it is true.

The Stranger. I certainly agree.

Socrates. In that case we may now describe both my philanthropy and your charity by saying that philanthropy is a sentiment proper to man in view of his desired perfection, and charity a senti-

ment proper to a god, or to a man inspired by a god, in view of the necessary imperfection of all living creatures.

The Stranger. Yes, if this god, or man taught by a god, is not scornful of imperfection, or indifferent, or even given to gloating over it, on the ground that it keeps the ball rolling. He must be a spirit made flesh, who himself suffers. This suffering cannot be stilled by establishing any tribe of animals, or any one soul, in its natural happiness. Such animal perfection in one quarter would be bought by mutilation and suffering elsewhere—in other animals hunted and devoured, in slavery, in all the rebellious instincts necessarily suppressed ; and what is even worse, something in the human spirit (which is not merely human) would be stifled by that happiness and would hate that perfection. The only cure for suffering which true wisdom and charity can seek is not perfect embodiment but complete emancipation.

Socrates. I am not surprised to hear it from your lips. In early Hellas men were growing whole and naturally cherished wholeness ; but later, when the bonds that bound our cities were relaxed, we, too, began to love dissolution. Now the discord in your soul has become hopeless, and you yearn to be dissolved into your elements. Far be it from me to blame your preference if sincere : a scotched worm when cut quite in two may lead its two lives more conveniently in separation. So in you matter and spirit ; but I ask myself whether you are a Christian because

you are dying, or are longing to die because you are a Christian.

The Stranger. I am not so much a Christian as that; yet when change is inevitable, why should we not live by changing? They say that there are poisons to which an organism may accustom itself, so that they may become elements of defence within it against other evils, perhaps more deadly. Christianity among us is one of these domesticated evils or tonic poisons, like the army, the government, the family, and the school; all of them traditional crutches with which, though limping, we manage to walk. From despair, at certain crises, comes a last spurt of courage; and after your day, when manly virtue had long disappeared, before quite dying of its sins, the world awoke to a fresh life by beginning to do penance.

Socrates. Better the cup of hemlock in time. Why nurse disease or deformity? Death is not an evil, but vileness is; and when vileness is cultivated for the sake of life it renders life vile also. I thanked the gods when I was alive for having been born a Greek and not a barbarian, and now that I am dead I thank them that I died in time, lest I should have become a Christian.

The Stranger. Is not even a Christian a man, with his transfigured type of perfection? In a later age you might have cultivated sanctity, as in your day you praised and defined the perfect rational animal. After all, were you not yourself constrained to turn away from this world and lay up your treasure in heaven?

Socrates. No, no: how should a plain man like me, plodding and carnal, desire the life of a god or dream of ever enjoying it? Was I a Heracles or a Ganymede? To heaven I never looked for a refuge from the earth, or a second native land: I saw there an eternal pattern to which men always might point, and after which they might religiously fashion their earthly lives and their human republic. You are mistaken if you think that I was ever comforted by dreams or satisfied with contemplating an idea. Poor craftsman that I was, what was the finest of ideas to me except a principle of art? Of what use could rule or compass be to me without a workshop, or the lodestar without a helm? Images in the fancy never enamoured me; even in stone or marble I held them cheap, and had no heart to cheat myself with that semblance, while living beauty remained absent from the flesh and from the soul of my countrymen. So little did the idea unrealized appease my hunger, that rather than starve on it I was content to love, or to pretend to love, naughty creatures like Athens or like Alcibiades; they were the best I could find, little as they satisfied my heart. Ah, if you could only guide me to some fair country, no matter how remote, where men actually live happy and are perfect after their kind, I would instantly disown Athens, Hellas, and even the placid immortality which Pluto has granted me here, in order to go and live among those creatures and learn their ways. No dislike of travel will stop

me, if once the good realized beckons me away. With what joy should I find that little city shining upon its hill, girt with impregnable walls that never held a traitor; hours appointed for rising and exercising and feasting and singing; words approved and words forbidden; prescribed garments or prescribed nakedness; sacred festivals coming round with the sun, and pleasures set apart for youth and for age, for men and for women; for to such musical paces the spirit of man must move if it would be beautiful and holy.

The Stranger. The men of my time would not relish your regimen.

Socrates. Nor did those of my time relish it. They loved anything and everything better than a perfect humanity. They had their way: abandoning their cities to ruin, neglecting to breed noble children, and to train them nobly, they became troops of ranging animals, with a homeless and dreaming mind. Those who now dwell on earth are not men but anthropoids; and when their race, too, is extinct—for it will soon destroy itself—if your friendly spirit happily survives, pray bring me the pleasant tidings; for humanity is immortal, and although matter for a season may lapse from that form, and the race may seem to be extinguished, the forgotten pattern is still inviolate in heaven, inviting and summoning that wayward substance to resume its possible beauty; nor can such divine magic be resisted for ever. If then some day the news should reach me that humanity is returning to the earth, I will humbly

beg Pluto, who is a kindly monarch over these Shades, to grant me leave for an hour to revisit the sun, in case Theseus or the children of Heracles might be coming down again from the snows of Haemus, and I might hear the Dorian trumpet resounding through the valleys and—incorrigible philanthropist that I am—I might feast my eyes at last upon the sight of A MAN.

IX

HOMESICKNESS FOR THE WORLD

Avicenna (*soliloquizing*). Great is Allah : even I, alas, could not deceive him. By every promise of faith and canon of the law, I should now find myself in The Paradise of the Prophet, reclining on silken cushions and sipping delicious sherbets ; the fresh sweet sound of bubbling fountains should comfort me ; I should be soothed by the scent of great sleeping flowers, their petals like amethysts and rubies and sapphires and liquid opals. I should be charmed by the sight of peacocks spreading their fans ; and the nightingales in the thicket of ilex should sing to me like my own heart. Some tender young maid, wide-eyed and nimble as a gazelle, should be not far from me ; her hair should be lightly touching my cheek ; my hand should be wandering over her bosom. From the impregnable safety of my happiness I should be looking abroad through all the heavens and surveying the earth ; the maxims of the wise should be on my lips and in my soul the joy of understanding. Walking upon the bastions of Paradise, my arm linked in that of a friend, of him that my soul trusts utterly, I should be

repeating the words of the poets, and he in answer, without haste or error, should be composing for me tenderer and more beautiful verses of his own; and we should be marvelling and sighing together at the ineffable greatness of God and the teeming splendour of the earth. Yes, legally, I should have been saved. Was I not exactitude itself in every religious duty? Did I ever allow myself the least licence, on the ground that I was a philosopher, unless I had a text to justify me? Did I blasphemously lay my assurance of salvation in my own merits or in the letter of the law, rather than in the complacency of the Compassionate and the Merciful One, who having made us can forgive and understand? Ah, if ever Allah could be deceived, certainly I should have deceived him. But the Omniscient looked into my secret heart, and perceived that I was no believer, and that whilst my lips invoked his name and that of the Prophet, my trust was all in Aristotle and in myself. Sharpening therefore in silence the sword of his wrath, he overruled my legal rights by a higher exercise of equity and reduced me for ever to the miserable condition of a pure spirit. Here among heathen ghosts I pine and loiter eternally, a shadow reflecting life and no longer living, vainly revolving my thoughts, because in my thoughts I trusted, and missing all the warm and solid pleasures of Paradise, because I had hoped to win them without blinding my intellect, or suffering old fables to delude me.

The Stranger (*who has approached unobserved*). Is it not some consolation to consider that if you were not able to deceive Allah, Allah was not able to deceive you?

Avicenna. Small consolation. Pride of intellect is the sour refuge of those who have nothing else to be proud of. Strong as my soul was in other virtues, and generous my blood, intellect prevailed too much in me, dashed my respect for my vital powers, and killed the confidence they should have bred; it overcame the illusions necessary to a creature, and caused me to see all things too much as God sees them.

The Stranger. A rare fault in a philosopher.

Avicenna. May Allah impute it to me for humility and not for blasphemy, but I never wished to resemble him. Yes, I know what you are about to say. The divine part in us, though small, is the most precious, and we should live as far as we may in the eternal. Far be it from me to deny that, or any other maxim of Aristotle; especially now, when that exiguous element in myself is all that is left of me. But, frankly, I pine for the rest. Are not even the souls of your friends the Christians, wretchedly as they are accustomed to live, waiting now in their forlorn heaven for the last day, when they shall return to their bodies, and feel again that they are men and not angels? Intellect, being divine, comes into our tents through the door; it is a guest and a stranger to our blood. Its language is foreign to us, and painfully as we may try to learn it, we

always speak it ill. How often have I laughed at Arabs pluming themselves in Persian, and at Persians blasphemously corrupting the syllables of the Koran which they thought to recite : for few, like me, are perfect masters of both tongues. And do you suppose Allah does not smile at our rustic accent when we venture to think ? But there are other tricks of ours which he does not laugh at, because he cannot imitate them. May we not pride ourselves a little on our illusions, on our sports, on our surprises, and on our childish laughter, so much fresher and sweeter than his solemnity ? Rather than be eternal, who would not choose to be young ? Do not the Pagans and Christians (who have never understood the greatness of Allah) confess as much, when in their fables they relate how the gods have become men for a season, shepherds, lovers of women, wanderers, even wonder-workers and beggars ; or how they have prayed, fasted, wept, and died ? Of course, such tales are impious ; Allah can never be deceived or diminished ; and to live in time, to dwell in a body, to thirst, to love, and to grieve are forms of impotence and self-deception. If we knew all, we could not live. But it is precisely this sweet cajolery, this vivid and terrible blindness of life, which Allah cannot share, in which his creatures shine. In order to know the truth, Allah alone sufficed ; he did not create us to supplement his intelligence. He created us rather that by our incorrigible ignorance we might diversify existence and surround his godhead with

beings able to die and to kill, able to dream, able to look for the truth and to tell themselves lies, able above all to love, to feel the life quickened suddenly within them at the sight of some other lovely and winsome creature, until they could contain it no longer, and too great, too mad, too sweet to be endured it should leap from them into that other being, there to create a third. If this madness was not worth having, as well as intellect, why did Allah create the world? Ah, he was solitary, he was cold, he shone like the stars in the wilderness on a frosty night; and when he bethought himself of his coldness and shuddered at his solitude, that pang of itself begat the companion with which his Oneness was pregnant, the Soul of the World; in order that the Intellect itself might grow warm in the eyes of the Soul that loved it, and be the star of her dark voyage, and that his solitude might turn to glory, because of the Life that flowed from him into the bosom of that loneliness and quickened it to all forms of love. Now this divine Soul of the World had in turn flowed into my soul more copiously than into that of other mortals. I had health, riches, arts, rare adventures, fame, and the choicest pleasures of both body and mind; but happiness I never had. So long as I still lived, sailing before the wind of my prosperity, I hardly perceived the division and misery of my being, or fancied that with my next triumph they would cease; but now I perceive them. I might have been happy, if I had not been a philosopher, or if I had been

nothing else. As it was, too much intellect made brackish the sweet and impetuous current of my days. Philosophy in me was not a harmony of my whole nature, but one of its passions, and the most inordinate, because I craved and struggled to know everything ; and this passion in me availed only to mock and embitter the others, without subduing them. I renounced nothing, I rejected nothing ; being but a man, I lived like a god, and my pride blasted my human nature. All actions worked themselves out in me without illusion, in the ghastly light of truth and of foreknowledge. Horror was never far from my pleasures. The fever of my ambitions must needs be perpetually accelerated, lest the too clear intellect in me should look upon them and they should die. I scorned the modesty of the sages who made of intelligence a second and a sundered life ; and as for lack of faith I missed the Paradise of the Prophet, even so, for lack of measure and renunciation, I missed the peace of the philosopher. I was wedded to existence as to a favourite wife, whom I knew to be faithless, but could not cease to love. Before the flight of time, before death, before Allah, I clasped my hands and wept and prayed, like a woman before her dying child or her estranged lover. Master in every cunning art, I was the slave of fate and of nature ; all I enjoyed I did not enjoy, because I craved to enjoy it for ever. I sighed for constancy in mortal things, in which constancy is not. I strove to command fortune and futurity, which will not be commanded.

I married a wife, and then another, and each was a burden more weary than the last. I became the father of children, and they died, or turned against me in their hearts. I made myself lord over science and over great estates, and I found myself the slave and steward of my possessions, and a vain babbler before the vulgar whom I knew I deceived. And yet, so long as the soul of nature fed the fountain of my being, it could not give over gushing and spreading and filling every cleft and hollow of opportunity. Even now, when the fountain is cut off, I yearn for that existence which was my torment; and my unhappiness has outlived its cause, and become eternal.

The Stranger. Since Spirit is not attached to one form of life rather than to another, may it not consent to dismiss each in turn? If we do not renounce the world, we must expect the world to forsake us. The union of spirit with nature is like the sporting friendships of youth which time dissolves naturally, without any quarrel. It was a happy union, and in a life like yours, full of great feats, there is more satisfaction in having lived than regret that life is over. But you know all this better than I; and if you choose playfully to lament your eclipse on earth (while you shine immortally here) I suspect you do so merely to rebuke me gently for playing the truant while I am still at school, and troubling you here prematurely by my illicit presence, when I ought to be living lustily, as you did, while yet I may.

Avicenna. You? If I had been condemned to

live in your skin, and in the world as it appears to be now, when there is nothing but meanness in it, I should not lament my present condition, because sad as it is, at least it is not ignoble. The only good thing remaining in your world is the memory of what it was in my day, and before : so that I am far from chiding you for spending your life, as far as possible, in our society, by rehearsing the memorials which remain of us, and which enable you, even in your day, to employ your time humanly, in the study of wisdom. I did that, too, with intense zeal ; but the earth was then propitious, and my soul was mighty, and every other art and virtue was open to me, as well as the wisdom of the ancients. You do well to water your little flower-pot, as I ranged over my wide preserves. Life is not a book to read twice : and you cannot exchange the volume fortune puts in your hand for another on a nobler theme or by a better poet. In reading it you should not look ahead, or you will skip too much. It is not the ending that matters. This story has no moral ; it stops short. The ending is not there, it is here ; it is the truth of that life seen as a whole. Brave men, like me, who skip nothing, are not disappointed ; at every turn they come upon something unforeseen, and do something bold. In the market of fortune I bought my apples without weighing them. If one had a worm in it, I threw it away laughing, my eye already on the next. Reason is like a dog that explores the road and all the by-ways when we walk abroad ; but he cannot

choose a direction or supply a motive for the journey, and we must whistle to him when we take a new turn.

The Stranger. Ah, you lived in an age of freedom. You were not ashamed of human nature, and if life was full of dangers, you were full of resource. Had we that strength, life would yield matter enough even in our day ; but no wealth of instruments can enrich a mind that has not elevation for commanding them. You prize the world because you were its master. Had you ever been the slave of business and love and opinion, as men are in my time, you would not regret being rid of them. You praise them because you made sport of them intellectually ; and destiny has done no injustice to your true nature in relegating you to this land of unconquerable mind. Mind in you was always supreme. Mere life and mere love have no memory ; the present dazzles them with its immediate promise, which the next moment denies or transforms. They roll on, and the flux of nature sucks them up altogether. But when intellect, as in you, comes to dominate life and love, these acquire a human splendour. The stream becomes the picture of a stream, the passion an ideal. As the privilege of matter is to beget life, so the joy of life is to beget intellect ; if it fails in that, it fails in being anything but a vain torment.

Avicenna. Certainly I was a man, and not a beast. I gloried in my actions, because I understood and controlled them ; they were my re-

tainers, standing with swords drawn before my gates, my servants spreading the feast before me, my damsels singing and dancing before my ravished eyes. Now, alas, I am a monarch without subjects ; reason in me has nothing to rule, and craft nothing to play with. Dear warm plastic flesh of my body and marrow of my bones, once so swiftly responsive to every heavenly ray, where are you scattered now ? To what cold thin dust are you turned ? What wind whirls you about in vain revolutions amid the sands of the desert ? Never, alas, never (since Allah denies you the hope of resurrection) will you be gathered again into a mirror without a flaw, into a jewel of a thousand rays, in order that the potency of life, which never ceases to radiate from the Most High, might be gathered and reflected in you, to your joy and to his glory. Barren you shall ever be of intelligence ; and barren my intelligence must remain in me here, impotently pining for the flesh in which it grew.

The Stranger. Is not sterility in ultimate things a sign of supremacy ? We disciples of Aristotle know that there is something ultimate and supreme in the flux of nature, even the concomitant form or truth which it embodies, and the intellect which arrests that form and that truth. This intellect ought to be sterile, because it is an end and not a means. The lyre has performed its task when it has given forth the harmony, and the harmony, being divine, has no task to perform. In sounding and in floating into eternal silence, it has lent

life and beauty to its parent world. Therefore I account you happy, renowned Avicenna, in spite of your humorous regrets ; for what survives of you here is the very happiness of your life, realized in the intellect, as alone happiness can be realized ; and if this happiness is imperfect, that is not because it is past, but because its elements were too impetuous to be reduced to harmony. This imperfect happiness of yours is all the more intelligible and comforting to me on account of its discords unresolved ; they bring you nearer to my day and to its troubles. You have all that we can hope for. Your frank lamentations trail the splendour of your existence ; they seem to me pure music in contrast to the optimism which simpers daily in a wretched world.

X

THE SECRET OF ARISTOTLE

The Stranger. To-day you smile, renowned Avicenna. Do you encourage me to approach? Or am I warned that I should be disturbing the sweeter society of your thoughts?

Avicenna. Neither, yet both. I was smiling at those old feats of lustiness and prowess which I was recounting—and with rare pleasure—when you were last here.[1]

The Stranger. It was a rare pleasure to listen.

Avicenna. Doubtless a purer pleasure to listen to such exploits than to remember them. I pine for my splendid past, and you seemed hardly to envy it.

The Stranger. I envy you your intelligence and moral sanity, because the shy beginnings of something of the sort are innate in me also. But how should I envy you your adventures? The flight of eagles and the swimming of porpoises are admirable to me in the realm of truth; I rejoice that there are such things in the world, but I am not tempted to experiment in those directions. So I relish your conversation here,

[1] The allusion is to a conversation not reported in this volume.

though I should have made the lamest of companions for you in the world.

Avicenna. You could not relish my virtue even in idea, had you no spurs to brandish in your particular cock-pit. These very escapades of yours among the Shades, in search of pure understanding, are but the last gasp of a sporting spirit. Therefore I tell you, Live while you may. The truth of your life is Allah's. He will preserve it.

The Stranger. Undoubtedly. If time bred nothing, eternity would have nothing to embalm. Of all men I am the last to belittle the world of matter or to condemn it. I feel towards it the most unfeigned reverence and piety, as to Hestia, Aphrodite, Prometheus, and all the gods of generation and art ; for I know that matter, the oldest of beings, is the most fertile, the most profound, the most mysterious ; it begets everything, and cannot be begotten ; but it is proper to spirit to be begotten of all other things by their harmonies, and to beget nothing in its turn.

Avicenna. What are you saying ? Who taught you that ?

The Stranger. Aristotle and reflection ; and I am proud to think that this conclusion is not very remote from that which your great intellect has drawn from the same sources.

Avicenna. But who can have revealed to you a secret which the Philosopher intentionally disguised, and which I too, following his example, never proclaimed openly ?

The Stranger. Many voyages have been made

since your day, and many discoveries ; and the ruin of empires and religions has repeatedly admonished mankind, if they have any wit at all, to distinguish fact from fable.

Avicenna. That is indeed the distinction which I learned privately to make, and to discover concealed in the prudent doctrine of the Philosopher ; but it was not at first blush, nor without a special revelation, that my great intellect discovered the truth.

The Stranger. Perhaps you learned the doctrines of Aristotle when you were too young to discount their language and freely to confront them with the facts of nature. I remember a story—probably there is no truth in it—that you had long found the *Metaphysics* unintelligible until you came by chance upon a stray commentary which solved the riddle.

Avicenna. The tale is true : not, of course, that having read the fourteen books of the *Metaphysics* no less than forty times, and knowing them perfectly by heart, both forwards and backwards, I failed to understand anywhere the meaning of the words, or how one part supported or seemed to contradict another, or what was written first and what added as a comment later, or in fine all that pedants call understanding a book ; but I had the soul of a philosopher, and such understanding was not understanding to me. What escaped me, and what I longed to discover, was how the doctrine of the book could be true. For I too had eyes in my head, the

earth shone clear in the sunlight before me; I knew only too well the hang of this naughty world; and I marvelled how a philosopher whose authority was unquestionable could give an account of things which so completely inverted their true order. The more commentaries I read and the more learned men I consulted, the less satisfaction I found; for not one of them had an eye for the truth, or any keen interest in real things, but all were absorbed in considering how words should be put together; and their philosophy was nothing but the grammar of an artificial tongue, a system of hieroglyphics with which to inscribe the prison-walls of their blindness and ignorance. Sunk in this conviction, and sullenly reconciled to it, I was walking one day in the *souk* of Bokhara, saluting the merchants, viewing and praising the rarities they displayed before me, buying or exchanging some jewel, questioning the strangers newly arrived concerning the disasters and the marvels they had witnessed in all the islands of the sea and in all the cities beyond the desert, when I perceived a venerable and courtly man who appeared to be following me; and turning to him I said: "Reverend Sir, didst thou wish anything of me?" Whereupon he placed his hand on his breast, and raised it thence to his forehead, and replied: "Young master, it is known to me that thou art the hope of the old and the despair of the young; and I bring thee a book of commentaries on the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle, a rarity hitherto unknown and a morsel

for a fine palate: name thy price and it is thine."—"Not for me," I replied; "pray, offer thy book to another. Have I not read the fourteen books of the *Metaphysics* full forty times, and do I not know them by heart, forwards and backwards, without understanding them? What can thy commentary avail? A truce to the riddles of the learned! Away with the gibberish of ancient fools! Give me a book of love, if thou hast one, or a tale of some far country, or the wild verse of a poet inspired by wine!" But the stranger was not discouraged. He smiled a little in his beard and spoke again: "Take it then for the calligraphy of the scribe; for it is fairly penned in black and red, with scrolls in gold and green and purple and silver."—"That is nothing," I retorted; "I have gold and silver and green and purple in plenty, and many a book in red and black script, choice thoughts of the poets, or maxims of ancient sages, wise men without books."—"Take it then," he persisted, "for the crimson damask it is wrapped in, and the silver clasp, with its black opal, with which it is clasped." And I said: "I have richer tissues and more beautiful clasps." Then his face was darkened; and bending towards me, that no one might overhear, he said sorrowfully: "Take it then for charity's sake: I am bereft and old, and in need of comfort. It is thine for a silver penny." Then I took a silver penny from my purse and gave it him, saying: "Keep thy rare book for thy comfort, and take this for thy need." But he

refused. "Accept it," he said once more, "for the love of Allah, as for the love of Allah I offer it: it is not worth a penny of silver nor a shekel of gold, but ten thousand talents." And he left the book in my hands, and with a quick step departed. Pondering then in myself how this was perhaps no commentary on the *Metaphysics*, nor an old scribe's treasure, but some message of love or secret gift from a princess, I opened the clasp, and sitting on the doorstep of a saddler's shop, I began to read; and all day I read, and when evening came on, without raising my eyes from the page, I made sign to the saddler to fetch me a lamp; and all night I continued, and all the following day; thrice I finished, and thrice began again. And the eyes of my soul were opened, and the true mind of the Philosopher descended on me, and I understood at last all that he wrote and all that he left unwritten.

Awaking at length to the outer world, I questioned the saddler and the merchants and the strangers and every passer-by, as to who that old man might be; but none knew him, except that in the darkest corner of some mosque perhaps I might find him praying. I sped accordingly like the wind from one mosque to another, bursting in here and vanishing there, my feet scarce touching the ground and my garments flying behind me; so that the faithful standing at intervals upon their carpets felt the swiftness of some influence that had passed near them, and said: "What is this that has flown by? Was

it a blast with the scent of lilacs from the garden ? Was it a ray of sunlight between two cypresses severed by the breeze ? Was it an angel gathering up our prayers and bearing them swiftly before the Lord ? " At last in the farthest and smallest mosque of the city, beside the burial-ground of the poor, I spied my lost benefactor ; and embracing him with a tender and a long embrace, I cried : " O most venerable sage and my father in God, what a blessing have I received at thy hands ! All I possess is as nothing to what I owe thee, and for the gift of knowledge all the riches of the earth would be a small return ; but what I can I will. Come with me into the presence of the Emir : he shall know that thou art the Solomon of the age—for it is not hidden from me that the author of this divine commentary is none other but thou—and the Emir shall bestow on thee a robe of honour, and thou shalt sit in the seat of authority amongst his scribes and alchemists and physicians and poets ; and all shall be silent when thou openest thy lips, and deem it a signal favour from Allah to be corrected by thee ; and I shall be the first to come before thee in the morning and the last to depart from thee at night ; because the fountains of Ararat are not sweeter to me than the purity of the truth, nor are the caresses of monarchs or the cozenings of princes of any worth in my eyes compared with the smile of wisdom." But he gently disengaged himself, and said : " It is too much. I am more than rewarded. Long had the secrets thou hast read in this book

lain upon my heart. They were not for this age. Opinion amongst mortals is like the song of a drunkard, merry and loud and exceedingly foolish and ravishing in its hollow sound ; and the cold light of truth is hateful to them as sunrise to the reveller. Therefore I had resigned myself to silence and to suffering my discoveries to go down with me to the grave. The truth is in no haste to be known ; it will be published at the last day. Thereupon a report reached me of thy free nature and thy keen mind, and having myself seen and heard thee, I said in my heart : ' This young man will understand, and in him my mind shall survive me.' Diligently therefore I committed my commentary to writing, inditing it scrupulously with my own hand, folding it in precious silks, and binding it with a magic and a jewelled clasp ; and the rest thou knowest. But since thy understanding has been quick beyond all expectation, and thy thanks generous beyond my desert, and since in thee my soul has indeed come to a second life, far from accepting any other recompense, let me complete my gift as is fitting : for who would bestow the precious stone and withhold the setting ? Let us then hasten together to the *cadi*, in order that in a formal writing and before witnesses I may institute thee heir to all I possess ; for I have chosen a life of poverty for the love of wisdom, not from necessity. I have other fair books and other jewels, and my camels' saddle-bags are heavy with gold. But for the journey I shall soon make, gold and silver

are useless, and before many days all shall be thine."—" May Allah lengthen those days into many years," I replied ; " and be they many or few they shall be spent in my house ; for if in mind I am thy heir, in heart let me be thy child." And from that hour we were as a father who has chosen his son, and a son who has chosen his father, until death, the divider of loves and the extinguisher of delights, separated us for ever.

The Stranger. And what—if it is not too much to ask—may have been the gloss made by this sage, which so wonderfully clarified the doctrine of Aristotle ?

Avicenna. You will not find it in my writings, because it does some violence to the conceit of mankind, who feeling within them some part of the energy of nature wish to attribute that energy to the fancies which it breeds ; and I have always made it a law to bow to custom in science as in manners. To rebel against comfortable errors is to give them too much importance. You will never enlighten mankind by offending them ; and even if by force or by chance you caused them verbally to recognize the truth, you would gain nothing in the end, for in their heads your accurate dogmas would turn at once into new fables. The better way is to coax and soften their imagination by a gentle eloquence, rendering it more harmonious with those secret forces which rule their destiny ; so that as by the tropes and hyperboles of poets, they may not be seriously deceived by your scientific shams. The very

currency and triteness of the lie will wear away its venom. Accordingly in my published treatises I made no effort to pierce the illusion which custom has wedded with the words of the Philosopher; but here, alas, illusions have no place, and if you wish to hear the unmentionable truth, in a few words I will repeat it.

My benefactor had entitled his profound work *The Wheel of Ignorance and the Lamp of Knowledge*; because, he said, the Philosopher having distinguished four principles in the understanding of nature, the ignorant conceive these principles as if they were the four quadrants of a wheel, on any one of which in turn the revolving edifice of nature may be supported; whereas wisdom would rather have likened those principles to the four rays of a lamp suspended in the midst of the universe from the finger of Allah, and turning on its chain now to the right and now to the left; whereby its four rays, which are of divers colours, lend to all things first one hue and then another without confusing or displacing anything. The ignorant, on the contrary, pushing their wheel like the blind Samson, imagine that the four principles (which they call causes) are all equally forces producing change, and co-operative sources of natural things. Thus if a chicken is hatched, they say the efficient cause is the warmth of the brooding hen; yet this heat would not have hatched a chicken from a stone; so that a second condition, which they call the formal cause, must be invoked as well, namely, the nature of an egg;

the essence of eggness being precisely a capacity to be hatched when warmed gently—because, as they wisely observe, boiling would drive away all potentiality of hatching. Yet, as they further remark, gentle heat-in-general joined with the essence-of-eggness would produce only hatching-as-such, and not the hatching of a chicken; so that a third influence, which they call the final cause, or the end in view, must operate as well; and this guiding influence is the divine idea of a perfect cock or of a perfect hen, presiding over the hatching, and causing the mere eggness in that egg to assume the likeness of the animals from which it came. Nor, finally, do they find these three influences sufficient to produce here and now this particular chicken, but are compelled to add a fourth, the material cause; namely, a particular yolk and a particular shell and a particular farmyard, on which and in which the other three causes may work, and laboriously hatch an individual chicken, probably lame and ridiculous despite so many sponsors. Thus these learned babblers would put nature together out of words, and would regard the four principles of interpretation as forces mutually supplementary, combining to produce natural things; as if perfection could be one of the sources of imperfection, or as if the form which things happen to have could be one of the causes of their having it.

Far differently do these four principles clarify the world when discretion conceives them as four

rays shed by the light of an observing spirit. One ray which, as the lamp revolves, sweeps space in a spiral fan, like the tail of a comet, is able to illuminate the receding past, and bears the name of memory. Memory only can observe change or disclose when and where and under what auspices one thing has been transformed into another, whether in nature or in the spirit's dream ; and memory only, if its ray could spread to the depths of the infinite, would reveal the entire efficient principle, the only proper *cause*, in the world ; namely, the radical instability in existence by which everything is compelled to produce something else without respite. The other three principles, made visible by the three other rays, have nothing to do with genesis or change, but distinguish various properties of accomplished being ; namely, existence, essence, and harmony. The rays by which these are revealed also have separate names. Thus the faculty that discerns existence is called sense, since it is sense that brings instant assurance of material things and of our own actuality in the midst of them. The faculty that discerns essence is called logic or contemplation, which notes and defines the characters found in existence and (in so far as may be opportune or possible) the innumerable characters also which are not found there. The faculty which discerns harmony is called pleasure or desire or (when chastened by experience and made explicit in words) moral philosophy. In themselves things are always harmonious, since they exist together,

and always discordant, since they are always lapsing inwardly and destroying one another; but the poignant desire to be and to be happy, which burns in the heart of every living creature, turns these simple co-existences and changes into the travail of creation, in one juxtaposition of things finding life, happiness, and beauty, and in another juxtaposition, no less unstable, finding ugliness, misery, and death. Thus as the Lamp of Knowledge revolves, the red ray of sense and the white ray of contemplation and the blue ray of memory and the green ray of love (for green, as the Prophet teaches, is the colour of the beautiful) slowly sweep the whole heaven; and the wise heart, glowing in silence, is consumed with wonder and joy at the greatness of Allah.

The Stranger. Allegory has its charm when we know the facts it symbolizes, but as a guide to unknown facts it is perplexing; and I am rather lost in your beautiful imagery. Am I to understand that matter alone is substantial, and that the other three principles are merely aspects which matter presents when viewed in one light or another?

Avicenna. Matter? If by that word you understand an essence, the essence of materiality, matter would be something incapable of existing by itself, much less could it be the ground of its own form or of its own impulses or transformations: like pure Being it would be everywhere the same, and could neither contain nor produce any distinctions. But the matter which exists and works is matter

formed and unequally distributed, the body of nature in all its variety and motion. So taken, matter is alive, since it has bred every living thing and our own spirit ; and the soul which animates this matter is spontaneous there ; it is simply the native plasticity by which matter continually changes its forms. This impulse in matter now towards one form and now towards another is what common superstition calls the attraction or power of the ideal. But why did not a different ideal attract this matter, and turn this hen's egg into a duckling, save that here and now matter was predisposed to express the first idea and not the second ? And why was either idea powerful over the fresh-laid egg, but powerless over the same egg boiled, except that boiling had modified the arrangement of its matter ? Therefore my benefactor boldly concluded that this habit in matter, which is the soul of the world, is the only principle of genesis anywhere and the one true cause.

The Stranger. I see : 'Tis love that makes the world go round, and not, as idolatrous people imagine, the object of love. The object of love is passive and perhaps imaginary ; it is whatever love happens to choose, prompted by an inner disposition in its organ. You are a believer in automatism, and not in magic.

Avicenna. Excellent. If the final cause, or the object of love, bears by courtesy the title of the good, believe me when I tell you that the efficient cause, the native impulse in matter, by moving

towards that object, bestows that title upon it. Who that has any self-knowledge has not discovered by experience in his own bosom, as well as by observation of the heavens, and of animals and men, that the native impulse in each of us chooses its goal, and changes it as we change, and that nothing is pursued by us or sensible to us save what we have the organ to discern, or the innate compulsion and the fatal will to love ?

The Stranger. There indeed you touch the heart-strings of nature ; and I well conceive your enthusiasm at finding at last a philosophy that vibrates with so much truth. But as for Aristotle, does not such an interpretation entirely reverse his doctrine ? Did he not blame his predecessors for having regarded living matter as the only principle of the world ?

Avicenna. And most justly. Wisdom is not confined to the knowledge of origins or of this living body of nature—things important only for the sake of the good or evil which they involve. The forms of things are nobler than their substance, and worthier of study ; and the types which discourse or estimation distinguishes in things are more important than the things themselves. A philosopher is a man, and his first and last care should be the ordering of his soul : from that centre only can he survey the world. Naturalists are often betrayed by their understanding of origins into a sort of inhumanity ; conscious of necessity, they grow callous to good and evil. Moreover, those early naturalists were at fault in

their own science, because they identified matter with some single kind of matter, like water or air, and made that substance the sole principle of genesis ; whereas the distribution, movement, habits, and fertility of all sorts of matter must be taken into account if nature and the soul of nature are to be described rightly. But the Philosopher never blamed the naturalists for being naturalists in season, and he was the greatest of naturalists himself. Doubtless in his popular works he accommodated himself to the exigences of current piety and of human conceit, seeming to make nature a product of morals, which is absurd ; and the converse is evidently the truth.

The Stranger. I agree that the converse is the truth ; but is this truth to be found in Aristotle ?

Avicenna. If it is the truth, it must have been his doctrine. Do you imagine that the wisest of men, living at the place and hour when human reason reached its noon, could be blind to so great a truth, when it is obvious to me and even to you ?

The Stranger. Admirable principle of exegesis, which assigns all truth to Aristotle and absolves us from consulting his works !

Avicenna. On the contrary, for that very reason, we need to consult and to ponder them unceasingly. Why else read a philosopher ? To count the places where his pen has slipped ? To note his inconsistencies ? To haggle over his words and make his name a synonym for his limitations ? Even if with some fleck or some crack, he is a mirror reflecting nature and truth, and for their

sake only do we look into him ; because without this mirror, in the dungeon in which we lie, we might be cut off from all sight of the heavens.

The Stranger. Was it a slip of the pen or a limitation to assert that the divine life has no material principle ? Must we not be wrong, then, in asserting that matter is the one principle of existence ?

Avicenna. Not at all. When the plectrum, in the hand of an imperfect player, strikes the strings of the lute, the hard dull blow is sometimes heard, as well as the pure music. In this way the material principle, when not fully vivified and harmonized, can disturb and alloy the spirit, in a life that is not divine. In the mind of God no such material accident intrudes, and all is pure music. But would this music have been purer, or could it have sounded at all, if there had been no plectrum, no player, no strings, and no lute ? You have studied the Philosopher to little purpose, if you suppose that it is by accident only that the deity is the final cause of the world, and that without any revolution of the spheres the divine intellect would contemplate itself no less blissfully than it now does. That is but a sickly fancy, utterly divorced from science. The divine intellect is the perfect music which the world makes, the perfect music which it hears. Hermes and Pan and Orpheus drew from reeds or conches, or from their own throats such music as these instruments were competent to make ; all other sorts of harmony, musically no less melodious, they suffered to remain

engulfed in primeval silence. So the soul of this world draws from its vast body the harmonies it can yield, and no others. For it was not the essence of the sounds which conches and throats and reeds might produce that created these reeds and throats and conches, but contrariwise. These sources of sound, having arisen spontaneously, the sounds they naturally make were chosen out of all other sounds to be the music of that particular Arcadia : even so the divine intellect is the music of this particular world. It contemplates such forms as nature embodies. The Philosopher would never have so much as mentioned a divine intellect—the inevitable note, eternally sustained, emitted by all nature and the rolling heavens—if the rolling heavens and nature had not existed.

The Stranger. I admit that such is the heart of his doctrine, and if he was never false to it, he was a much purer naturalist than his disciples have suspected. The eternity he attributed to the world, and its fixed constitution, support this interpretation : nature was the organ of deity, and deity was the spirit of nature. Yet this confirmation creates a difficulty for you in another quarter, since a Moslem must deny the eternity of the world.

Avicenna. Not if we distinguish, as we should, eternity from endless time. The world is eternal, under the form of truth, as the divine intellect apprehends it; but, measured by its own measure of days and years, the world had a beginning and will have an end. So revelation teaches, and it is

not by a feigned conformity that I accept this dogma. My own time is over ; I have passed into the eternal world ; and something within me tells me that universal nature also is growing weary of its cycles, and will expire at last.

The Stranger. And when nature is no more, will God have ceased to be ?

Avicenna. Have you read the Philosopher and do you ask such a question ? The vulgar imagine that when change ceases, empty time will continue after ; or, that before change began empty time had preceded ; and it is a marvel to them how one moment of that vacant infinity could have been chosen rather than another for the dawn of creation. All this is but childish fancy and the false speech of poets. Eternity is not empty or tedious, nor does time occupy one part of it, leaving the rest blank. Eternity is but the synthesis of all changes, be they few or many ; and truth, with the divine intellect which beholds the truth, can neither arise nor lapse. They are immutable, though the flux they tell of is fugitive, and themselves not anchored in time, though the first and the last syllable of time are graven on them as on a monument.

The Stranger. Is eternity the tomb of time, and does intellect resemble those Egyptian monarchs who went to dwell in their sepulchres before they died ? Ah, we Christians and artists have a secret hidden from the children of this world, the secret of a happy death. Sometimes life, by a rapturous suicide, likes to embalm itself in a work of art, or

in a silent sacrifice. The breathlessness of thought also is a kind of death, the happiest death of all, for spirit is never keener than in the unflickering intellect of God, or in that of a philosopher like you or even like me, who can raise the whole or a part of the flux of nature into the vision of truth.

Avicenna. Tombs, indeed, and visions, and death, and eternity—why harp on them now, when you are still alive? Leave us while yet you may. We have no need of you here, or you of us there. Soon enough you must join us, whether you will or no. Hasten, before it is too late, to your thriftless brothers in the earth; or if they will not listen, admonish your own heart, and be not deceived by the language which philosophers must needs borrow from the poets, since the poets are the fathers of speech. When they tell you that Allah made the world, and that its life and love are an emanation from him, and that quitting this life you may still live more joyfully elsewhere, they speak in inevitable parables; for in truth it is the pulse of nature that creates the spirit and chooses a few thoughts (among many thoughts unchosen) and a few perfections (among all the perfections unsought) to which it shall aspire; and the special harmony which this vast instrument, the revolving world, makes as it spins is the joy and the life of God. Dishonour not then the transitive virtue within you, be it feeble or great; for it is a portion of that yearning which fills the world with thought and with deity, as with a hum of bees. Love

peoples even these regions with us melancholy phantoms ; and had my body not moved and worked mightily on earth, you would never have found among the Shades even this wraith of my wisdom.

THE END

"Mr. Santayana's style is a perfect instrument for such semi-philosophical writings as these. It charms us by its demure wit, melancholy cadences, and vivid imagery, and it succeeds, as none more ponderous could do, in precisely expressing abstract thoughts without recourse to a technical vocabulary. . . . The impression made upon the reader is . . . of ideas being passed like jewels from one hand to another."

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